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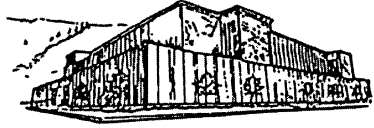
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“JUST DO IT!”:
A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF NIKE’S “HERO” ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN
FOR WOMEN

By

Jennifer Joi Lewis

B.A. Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA 1997

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

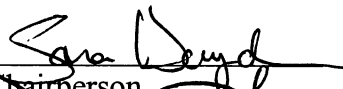
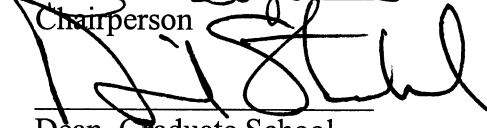
Master of Arts

The University of Montana

Department of Communication Studies

December 2004

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ABSTRACT

Lewis, Jennifer J., M.A., December 2004

Communication Studies

Just Do It!: A Rhetorical Criticism of Nike's "Hero" Advertising Campaign For Women

Advisor: Dr. Sara E. Hayden SH

Advertising is a powerful form of mass media that carries with it a tremendous potential to both educate and socialize its audience. However, because the purpose of commercial advertising is to create a desire that must be fulfilled through the purchase of a product, most of the messages reflected to audiences, and particularly women, about what constitutes desirable and normal cultural standards serves to create unrealistic and unattainable expectations. In its efforts to capitalize on the ways in which Title IX legislation has led to enormous growth in the arena of women's sports, the Nike Corporation has been targeting women in its advertising campaigns for the past fifteen years. One of these campaigns, which the author refers to as the "Hero" print advertising campaign, was featured in a broad range of mainstream magazines in the late 1990's and encouraged women and girls to view themselves and other women as "heroes," urging the reader to redefine by her own standards the ideals of strength, femininity, and beauty rather than accept outdated cultural norms. Centering its message on issues of inequality that women and girls face, particularly within the realm of athletics, Nike invited the reader to participate in the ad by reflecting on her own experiences with these issues. Multiple target audiences for the "Hero" ads are described, and varied interpretations for each of these audiences and the implications of those readings are considered. The author examines the advertisements through the theoretical lenses of body feminism and identification, and argues that for particular readers in the audience, an active engagement with the ads can constitute feminist consciousness raising, beginning an ongoing process that continues to evolve with further examination and discussion of the issues with other women. Acknowledging that the feminist awareness gained through this process is limited by its context, the author discusses the possibility for consciousness gained within the realm of athletics to carry over into broader social contexts. Implications of these findings for third wave feminism are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

As a cornerstone of the mass media, advertising is one of the most powerful tools of education and socialization in American society (Kilbourne, 2000, 1987; Cortese, 1999; Twitchell, 1995; Goffman, 1979). The main purpose of advertising is not simply to sell a product; indeed, advertising is now considered one of the major channels through which we learn about the values, attitudes, and ideals of our culture (Kilbourne, 2000, 1987; Twitchell, 1995). Unfortunately, the majority of the messages we as consumers (and particularly female consumers) receive about what is considered acceptable, normal, and desirable in American culture reflect an ideal that is homogeneous, as well as absolutely unattainable (Wolf, 1991).

For the past fifteen years, the Nike Corporation has been focusing a large segment of its marketing efforts on the female consumer. These advertising campaigns have come to be known for the manner in which they have given legitimacy to both the personal and shared experiences of growing up female, as well as their placement of female athleticism within an atmosphere of self-actualization and personal awareness (Singley, 2002). Nike's advertising campaigns for women have generated much popular attention as well as controversy, and are therefore useful for understanding the changes in feminism, and the manner in which feminist theory has been incorporated into popular culture.

This paper will focus on one Nike women's campaign in particular, the "Hero" print advertising campaign, which was featured in a broad range of mainstream magazines in the late 1990's. The campaign focused on women and girls in sports, and encouraged women to view themselves and other women as "heroes." The ads urged the reader to redefine for herself what it meant to be "strong," "feminine," and "beautiful,"

rather than adhere to the tired, outdated norms of femininity and beauty that advertising has traditionally promoted.

Certainly, the message of the “Hero” advertising campaign was not altruistic; that is, Nike’s intent as the rhetor was undoubtedly to make money by creating and attempting to sell a representation of women and girls that would appeal to the broadest possible audience. I argue that in order to accomplish this, the creators of the “Hero” campaign crafted a message that promoted liberating and empowering feminist themes, while simultaneously constraining those themes with more subtle representations of traditional femininity. Consequently, the multiple meanings incorporated into Nike’s message resonated with various segments of the audience, albeit for different reasons. In my analysis, I illustrate the ways in which Nike’s “Hero” advertising campaign for women simultaneously promoted and constrained feminism, and I examine these conflicting messages and their meanings within the context of a variety of subject positions, ranging from feminist to non-feminist. Furthermore, I assert that by engaging personal experience, and by encouraging a closer examination of the structural contradictions for women within the realm of athletics, “Hero’s” message had the potential to function as a device of consciousness raising for certain audiences. Finally, I argue that despite the constraints and limitations of its message, the “Hero” advertising campaign ultimately reflected the potential and promise for advertising as a form of rhetoric to effect social change in a positive manner.

In this paper, the “Hero” campaign will be examined through the lens of body feminism, an epistemology that privileges bodily experiences in the process of “coming to know,” and values these individual experiences as a starting point for developing an

understanding of the world. Burke's theory of identification will be discussed in conjunction with body feminism, as it is a central component in the process of consciousness raising. This campaign will be examined as it is situated within the context of Nike's "Just Do It!" advertising campaign, women in sports in the twentieth century, and second- and third wave feminism.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The topic of women in sports has been addressed within many contexts, whether political, social, or economic, particularly within the last twenty-five years. It is essential to have a general knowledge of these contextual events which have surrounded and created Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign, in order to develop a more informed understanding of its complexity and significance in American culture. Thus, the objective of this contextual analysis is to provide the reader with a general foundation upon which the "Hero" campaign rests, in order to gain a broader perspective of the situation in which these advertisements originate. The analysis will begin with an overview of Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women; this will include an examination of Nike's "Just Do It!" campaign, in order to gain insight into the overall advertising campaign in which "Hero" is situated. This will be followed by a brief overview of women in sports in the twentieth century, including a description of Title IX legislation and a discussion of the situation of women and girls in sports from 1972 to the present. Finally, a historical overview of second and third wave feminism will be offered.

Overview of Nike's "Hero" Advertising Campaign

Nike is one of the world's leading designers and marketers of athletic footwear, apparel, equipment, and accessories for a variety of athletic and fitness activities. Its total revenues for 2001 were over \$9.5 billion (nikebiz.com, 2002). The "Hero" advertising campaign was an offshoot of Nike's overall "Just Do It" advertising campaign, which has enjoyed enormous success since its inception in 1988 (nikebiz.com, 2002).

Just Do It

Beginning as a young start-up shoe company called "Blue Ribbon Sports," Nike was founded in 1972 by Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman. Building on Bowerman's reputation as a well-respected track coach at the University of Oregon, the company targeted NCAA coaches and teams all over the United States (nikebiz.com, 2002). It quickly came to be known as a company that catered to serious, like-minded male athletes. Scott Bedbury, former Nike director of corporate advertising, points out that, "'Brand Nike' was essentially pure competition: Its brand DNA was testosterone heavy, with a 'wimps need not apply' ethos" (Bedbury, 2002, p. 1).

By the late 1970's and early 1980's, one of the noted cultural trends in the United States was an increasing sense of concern and awareness of the need to be physically fit (Cahn, 1994; Theberge and Birrell, 1994; MacNeill, 1988). Americans were developing a new consciousness of the physical and psychological benefits of exercise and a healthy lifestyle, thus resulting in a "fitness boom." Interest in such activities as aerobics, running, walking, biking, weightlifting, basketball, and softball blossomed, and the

number of consumers purchasing exercise and sport equipment was at an unprecedented high (CFAR, 1998).

Women were an important part of this “fitness boom” (Cahn, 1994; Theberge and Birrell, 1994; MacNeill, 1988). Because of the women’s movement and Title IX legislation, the doors were being opened for more women to participate in sport and fitness activities than ever before. One of the results of women’s increased participation in physical fitness activities was an explosion in the popularity of aerobics classes, which many considered to be a more traditionally “feminine” type of exercise (CFAR, 1998; Cahn, 1994).

Increased participation of women in fitness activities translated into an increased demand for athletic shoes and gear for women. Reebok, one of Nike’s toughest competitors, was one of the first athletic companies to recognize and capitalize on the enormous potential of the women’s market, particularly in the area of aerobics. By the mid-1980’s, Reebok had captured a huge share of the sneaker market as a result of the successful sales of their aerobics shoes for women (CFAR, 1998).

The combination of these precipitating factors—the “fitness boom,” women’s growing role in the realm of fitness and athletics, and increasing competition from Reebok—forced Nike executives to realize that in order to continue to grow, the company had to incorporate a broader base of consumers into its marketing strategies (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003). Reflecting on Nike’s position during this period, Bedbury notes that the company was, “in a very tough spot. We had to stop talking just to ourselves and open up the access point to the brand. The emotional and physical

benefits to sports and fitness were much more expansive than we had defined them to date” (Bedbury, 2002, p.1).

Nike’s response was the introduction of the “Just Do It” advertising campaign in 1988 (Bedbury, 2002; nikebiz.com, 2002; Buss, 2000; CFAR, 1998). Developed by Wieden + Kennedy Ad Agency of Portland, Oregon, “Just Do It” began with an ad that featured wheelchair racer Craig Blanchette (nikebiz.com, 2002; Buss, 2000). There were twelve ads in the original campaign and many of these ads were notably inclusive of differences in gender, age, race, ability, and fitness level (CFAR, 1998).

The ads in the “Just Do It” campaign often focused on the people wearing Nike products rather than on the product itself, and many of the ads were infused with explicit and implicit jokes; this was a new advertising strategy for Nike (CFAR, 1998). While humorous and often cynical, “Just Do It” ads encouraged the audience to take control of their physical fitness. Sport celebrities were also incorporated into several ads, such as football and baseball dual athlete Bo Jackson, tennis player John McEnroe, or basketball great Michael Jordan, to endorse the product and enhance its ethos (CFAR, 1998). As the campaign continued and as women continued to become a more targeted audience, well-known female athletes such as Sheryl Swoopes and Cynthia Cooper, professional women’s basketball players, and soccer standout Mia Hamm, were featured in the ads, as well.

Nike describes “Just Do It” as, “a call to action, a refusal to hear excuses, and a license to be eccentric, courageous, and exceptional” (nikebiz.com, 2002). Based on the ideal of an intense athlete whose main competitor is herself, the message seemed to illustrate the company’s own philosophy and mission of determination, passion, and

above all, hard work. This advertising campaign has attempted to change the image of exercise from that of a sweaty, time-consuming, and sometimes painful activity into something that is exciting, very personal, rewarding, and perhaps even a little sexy. Michael Markowitz, a branding consultant from Santa Fe, states that “the fitness craze was all about the craving for personal empowerment,” and applauds Nike for having had, ...the guts to own it and the brilliance to articulate it. It was the idea that I can pull out of myself anything I want to, and do anything. Nike became the representation for this almost archetypical development in Western Society, and...became not just a brand but a myth (Buss, 2000).

“Just Do It” has become synonymous with the Nike brand name, and has virtually become a cultural phenomenon. From speeches and sermons to bumper stickers and movies, it is not uncommon for Americans to hear this well-known phrase in everyday conversation. In fact, the “Just Do It” campaign has even been incorporated into the Smithsonian National Museum’s “Americana” exhibit (nikebiz.com, 2002).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that despite its success and popularity, the “Just Do It” campaign has not been without criticism. Some have argued that the ads are “sociopathic,” while one critic called the campaign, “an impatient-bordering-on-contemptuous exhortation to the masses” (CFAR, 1998, p. 2). Feminist authors such as Susan Bordo (1997) see the message behind this advertising campaign as troubling at best. Bordo has written about the cultural myths that are tied into the “pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps” line of thought that Nike espouses. She argues that “Just Do It” promotes the illusion that success is equally attainable, without acknowledging those structural differences that prevent or deny access to opportunities for certain individuals

of a particular gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status, ability, or sexuality. In other words, in the Nike world, failure is never the result of a lack of opportunity; failure is for wimps who obviously didn't try hard enough. This message is problematic, Bordo maintains, because it creates a version of reality that is seductive in theory—that is, if an individual works hard, that individual will invariably succeed. In practice, however, this theory ignores the structural inequalities that prevent upwardly mobile opportunities for some, and serves to create unrealistic expectations.

Although there has been some negative response to the campaign, “Just Do It” has clearly been quite successful, and is one of the major forces behind Nike’s emergence as a prominent leader in the athletic gear industry. Between 1988 and 1998, Nike increased its share of the domestic athletic-shoe business from 18% to 43%, and increased its worldwide sales from \$877 million to \$9.2 billion (nikebiz.com, 2002; CFAR, 1998).

As Nike attempts to grow in response to the times, a new emphasis has been placed on the potential of the women’s market (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Singley, 2002; nikebiz.com, 2002; LoRusso, 1998). The 1990’s have brought with them the first generation of women for whom participation in sport has always been an option. As a result, the popularity of women’s sports is at an all-time high, and the demand for women’s athletic shoes and apparel has exploded (Buss, 2000). Consequently, the sports industry has found a valuable consumer market in women; in 1994 the sales of women’s athletic footwear was greater than that of men for the first time, and by 1995 women spent \$6 billion compared to men’s \$5.6 billion (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003).

To capitalize on this demand, Nike has focused on a strategic initiative to improve and integrate the technical design, marketing, merchandising, and retail processes of

women's athletic apparel, footwear, and equipment (nikebiz.com, 2000). As Nike's co-founder and CEO, Phil Knight, states, "Nike women's business is one of our major growth accelerators in the U.S. and internationally, making it one of our company's top priorities" (nikebiz.com, 2000). Nike's current emphasis on the women's market is reflected by the ways in which the overall "Just Do It" campaign has evolved, particularly within the last fifteen years, to incorporate several advertising campaigns which specifically target the female audience.

The Hero Advertising Campaign For Women

As a part of this attempt to segment its brand and marketing strategies toward the women's market, Nike introduced the "Hero" print advertising campaign in 1999, and the ads ran for approximately a year and a half. Situated between the 1996 Olympics, dubbed "The Year of the Woman," and the 1999 World Cup victory of the United States women's soccer team, the "Hero" campaign marked a definitive turning point in the history of women's sports (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Singley, 2002).

Over the last decade, Nike has earned a solid reputation for its women's advertising campaigns, which have become very popular with young female consumers. Other successful Nike women's campaigns which preceded "Hero" included the 1991 "Did you ever wish you were a boy?" ads, the 1995 "If You Let Me Play" campaign, and the "I Can" ads of 1998. Carol Singley (2002) notes that the messages contained in these ads have inspired thousands of young women to phone Nike corporate headquarters to express their appreciation, and to ask for copies of the ads to hang on their refrigerators and bulletin boards (p. 460).

Although “Hero” was featured primarily in women’s health and fitness magazines, such as *Fitness*, *Women’s Sports and Fitness*, *Health*, *Shape*, and *Runner’s World*, these ads could also be seen in a number of popular mainstream and fashion magazines, including *Time*, *People*, *Newsweek*, *Glamour*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*. Nike’s message was viewed by a broad audience, due to the wide variety of magazines that were chosen as the campaign’s backdrop; this is a significant point, as each of the magazines in which the “Hero” campaign was featured attracts a particular type of audience, and each of these interpretive communities bring a distinct perspective to their reading of the advertisements. As Ceccarelli discusses in her 1998 essay on polysemy, perspective is always informed by knowledge and experience, and thus the reader’s interpretation of the message and engagement with the text is likely to vary considerably, according to her interests and background. Presumably, readers of this advertising campaign will interpret the message differently according to their varying experiences with sports and fitness activities, feminism, or even the interests that are represented by each magazine in which the ads are located. For example, the meaning derived from the ads by a reader of *Runner’s World* or *Shape* may differ from that of a reader of *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, or *People*. Consequently, the potential for multiple and diverse interpretations of Nike’s message amongst the readers in the target audience must be considered, along with the fact that these interpretations will presumably vary along a continuum of sorts, from oppositional to hegemonic. As a critic, it is important to acknowledge that my own interpretation of this campaign has also been informed by my education and my personal experiences as a former two-sport college athlete, avid runner and marathoner, and third wave feminist.

A Description of the Advertisements

Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign consisted of nine advertisements, which were designed to look like pages from an old, well-worn family scrapbook. Each ad was illustrated with the same yellowed, tattered pages, leather cover, black and white (as well as color) photos, and wire-ring binder in the center, thus providing a sense of consistency and continuity to the campaign. These easily recognizable features of "Hero" enabled the reader to not only distinguish the ads from others, but to actually associate them with one another. That is, it appeared as if each new ad was simply another page in the same scrapbook.

The illustrations in these nine advertisements portrayed young girls and women of a variety of skin tones and races, who appeared to be able-bodied and healthy. The subjects of each ad were captured as they were actively participating in a variety of activities, among them: a young girl standing alone, wearing a baseball/softball uniform and holding a mitt; a young girl standing in a field, wearing a sundress and sport sandals and smiling directly at the camera; a young woman, presumably a mother, holding a baby up to her shoulder; a young girl, naked from the waist up, sitting on a mattress and drying her hair; a professional basketball player, high-fiving a teammate; a grandmother playing softball in her younger days, juxtaposed against her professional soccer player-granddaughter dribbling a soccer ball, along with an image of the two posed together; a blurred image of a woman walking; and a little girl, dressed in a ballerina costume and playing dress-up. Additionally, one of the images portrayed a set of weights, the top four and lightest of which read "TONED," while the bottom five read "MANLY."

The first advertisement in the series was designed to appear as the front cover of a photo album. A picture of a young girl, dressed in a baseball or softball uniform and gazing at the reader with a serious expression on her face, graced the cover of the “scrapbook.” The copy in this ad asked the reader:

Will she look at magazines and think she has to be as thin as the models she sees? Think that independence makes her less desirable? Lower her expectations because she can’t find women to look up to? (Appendix A)

These key questions, and their implicit answers, served to preview the themes and traditional gendered concepts which were addressed and reconfigured through the “Hero” campaign: “heroes” and “heroism;” “beauty” and “beautiful;” and “femininity.”

The ads were centered on the theme of women’s struggle with the ever-present beauty culture, and the frustration of attempting to balance feminist ideals with personal relationships and structural realities that do not always support those ideals (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003). The words and images seen in the photo album asked the reader to recall her past and present experiences with oppression as a woman in American society. Through its message, “Hero” challenged the reader to consciously choose to create her future differently.

The Ideal of a “Hero”

The fact that Nike established this campaign on the ideal of a “hero,” a term that has traditionally carried with it a masculine connotation, is worth noting. The Oxford English Dictionary clearly describes a hero as a man who exhibits one or more of the following traits: superhuman strength, ability or courage; extraordinary valor and martial achievement; brave and noble; fortitude, resolve and greatness of soul; admired and

recognized for his achievements and noble characteristics (Brown and Little, 1993). In classical literature, this particular type of man was the subject around whom an epic was centered. Similarly, in North American popular culture, the hero is most often portrayed in terms of a hegemonic masculine ideal: he is typically stoic; independent; physically aggressive or violent; dominant; confident; strong; rugged; and superhuman (Abele, 2002). He is the main character who battles against evil to save the world, who always emerges victorious, and who ultimately wins the fair lady in the process. Images of actors such as John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Sylvester Stallone, or characters such as Superman, Spiderman, and Batman, immediately come to mind as vivid examples of the stereotypical, Western big-screen hero.

The “Hero” campaign challenged this representation of a hero by urging women to not simply coopt the masculine definition of this ideal, but to redefine this concept within a feminine context, and to claim the definition of a hero for themselves. The ads encouraged women to view themselves and other women as heroes, not based on their appearance or because of rare acts of bravery, but rather because of their personal strength, their spark, their care for others, their everyday choices, their example, their work, and their accomplishments. Women were encouraged through the ads to learn what it means to celebrate themselves and other women for exactly who they are, rather than simply to accept society’s tired, outdated ideal of woman as a sexual or love object, existing to be desired by others. In so doing, the “Hero” campaign promoted a message of independence, strength, pride, and confidence for women and girls.

An Overview of the History of Women's Sports in the United States: 20th Century

It is difficult to summarize the history of women's experiences with sport in the United States in a neat and tidy fashion. In any given period of time, woman's role within the realm of sports and fitness has been largely dependent upon her role in the broader historical, sociological, and ideological contexts. Thus, the history leading up to the present-day experience of women in sports has not been a continuous, evolutionary flow of events; rather, it has been an episodic and unpredictable process that has impacted, and been impacted by, the interrelationship of social, economic, and political factors (Hult, 1994; Struna, 1994; Guttmann, 1991; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983). The development of women's sporting history in the United States can be broken down into three major periods: the colonial era (pre-1800); the nineteenth century (1800-1900); and the modern age (1900-present). The focus of this analysis will be on women's sports and fitness during the modern age, with particular emphasis on the period from 1972 to the present, following the passage of Title IX.

During each era of women's sporting history, society's willingness to accept the participation of women in sports has been influenced by several important factors. These influences include: warnings and advice from the medical profession about the limitations and weaknesses of women's anatomy and physiology; concern about the biological, physical, and psychological effects of sport on women, including their ability to reproduce; assumptions and norms about what constitutes "proper" and "acceptable" feminine behavior; changing opinions and attitudes about beauty and bodily form; and power relations in athletics, particularly with regard to athletic governance (Hult, 1994; Struna, 1994; Guttmann, 1991; Twin, 1979).

In the first part of the twentieth century, opportunities for women to participate in sport were available though not abundant, and societal acceptance of women's involvement in such activities was limited (Hult, 1994; Struna, 1994; Guttmann, 1991; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983; Twin, 1979). Tennis, golf, gymnastics, bicycling, basketball, swimming, and field hockey were the major sporting events of women during this time period, and the main purpose for participating was personal and social enjoyment, rather than competition. These activities were primarily enjoyed by upper- and middle class women (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983).

The time period between 1940-1960 saw many changes in the attitudes and behaviors of American women; these changes were reflected in the situation of women in sport (Hult, 1994; Struna, 1994; Guttmann, 1991; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983). As World War II began, women began to take on nontraditional roles in the family and the labor market in order to replace the men who had gone abroad to fight in the war. As women began to step outside the realm of traditional feminine roles, and as more opportunities were developing, increasingly higher numbers of women were participating in competitive sports (Hult, 1994). In 1943, the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League was established, which continued to operate until 1954. This organization has gained attention in recent years, due to the popular movie, "A League of Their Own" (Struna, 1994). Another such opportunity was the Ladies Professional Golf Association, organized in 1949, which was able to offer \$15,000 in prize money during its first year (Guttmann, 1991).

Arguably the most important development of women's competitive sport in the 1940's, however, came from women's track and field teams at African American colleges

such as Tennessee State and Tuskegee Institute. These colleges were turning out the standout athletes who integrated the United States Olympic teams and revolutionized the sport of track and field. One of these such athletes was Wilma Rudolph, whose three gold medals in the 1960 Rome Olympics served as a foreshadowing of the changes that were about to occur for women in sports (Hult, 1994; Struna, 1994; Guttmann, 1991; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983).

The 1960's and 1970's brought a dynamic and continued growth to women's sports (Struna, 1994). Many new opportunities have been created for women in sports, along with a substantial increase in the number of women who were willing to take advantage of them (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983). By the 1960's, social action movements such as the New Left, Civil Rights, youth culture, and the second wave of the feminist movement had significantly impacted American culture in general, and subsequently the sports world (Hult, 1994; Guttmann, 1991). By rejecting the idea that competition in sports is "masculine," as well as promoting a more inclusive ideal of the concept of "femininity," the women's movement contributed in essential ways to the changes that were occurring in the arena of athletics as more women and girls began to participate (Hult, 1994). The most significant impact that the feminist movement has had on the area of women in sports, however, has been through its legislative efforts with regard to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

Title IX

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving

federal financial assistance (excerpt from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, in Riley and Cantu, 1997).

Following the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and the United States women's soccer team's World Cup victory in 1999, Title IX has been the focus of much media attention. As "Title IX Babies," as they have been dubbed, are coming of age women's level of participation in athletics has reached an all-time high, and continues to rise. Despite strong resistance, as illustrated by the present-day debate regarding the recommendations of the Bush Administration's Commission on Opportunity in Athletics, Title IX has been a watershed in the ascendancy of women's athletics in the United States (Suggs, 2002; Bryjak, 2000; Weistart, 1998).

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 emerged from a period in United States history in which sexism and women's rights had become important political issues. As such, Title IX was the result of the efforts of women's rights advocates who urged lawmakers to effect changes in the educational system at the national level. It was their hope that this legislation would control and eventually put an end to the sex discrimination that pervaded the American system of education (Greendorfer, 1998; Heide, 1978).

A branch of Civil Rights legislation, Title IX states that all educational institutions that receive federal funding must provide equal opportunities for both males and females in education programs and activities (Bryjak, 2000; Greendorfer, 1998; Riley and Cantú, 1997; Nelson, 1994). Title IX covers all aspects of all education programs and activities of a school district, college, or university, including admission of students; nondiscriminatory treatment of students of both sexes once admitted to an institution; and

equal employment opportunities for both men and women within an educational institution (Riley and Cantú, 1997; Oglesby, 1978; Hogan, 1976). Schools that fail to adhere to the requirements of Title IX risk losing their federal funding, as determined by the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Carpenter, 1993; Oglesby, 1978; Hogan, 1976).

It is interesting to note that, while only 4% of its final regulations directly relate to athletics, Title IX's influence has perhaps been most evident within the realm of women's sporting experience in the United States (Greendorfer, 1998). Title IX has had an enormous impact on women's levels of participation in athletics. According to the Women's Sports Foundation, in 1972, 1 out of 27 female high school students in the United States played sports. By the 1996-97 school year, the ratio was 1 in 3, and roughly 40% of all high school student-athletes were girls (Cook, 1998). Prior to Title IX legislation, 15% of all college athletes were women, but only 2% of the total athletic budget was granted to female athletes. While men's college sports teams traveled courtesy of athletic departments, many women's teams were forced to raise money through bake sales, raffles, and car washes in order to pay for travel. By 1998, women comprised 40% of college athletes at Division I schools, and received 40% of athletic scholarships, 36% of the overall budget for university athletics, 32% of available recruiting resources, and 28% of coaches' salaries (Bryjak, 2000). Although sporting conditions for women have improved continuously within the last 30 years, the budget allotted for women's and men's teams still has not reached equality in the majority of American colleges and universities.

Certainly, this enormous growth in women's athletics has not been the result of Title IX alone. As Hogan noted in 1976,

Title IX is a catalyst forcing schools into intense review, discussion, self-examination and re-evaluation. It is important to remember that with or without Title IX many schools have already increased opportunities for women in sports, and are on the road toward... eventual equality (p. 179).

This mandate brought women's struggles as athletes to the forefront of American consciousness for the first time, and brought to light what female physical educators and athletes had known for a long time: that women and girls who wanted to develop their bodies and minds through participation in sports were not being supported, and in fact, were being discriminated against. Women's increasing opportunity in sport has been an ongoing, evolving process that was greatly facilitated by the creation of Title IX in 1972.

Despite its obvious positive impact on the lives of girls and women in the United States, Title IX has met with considerable, ongoing resistance (Suggs, 2002; Bryjak, 2000; Greendorfer, 1998; Weistart, 1998). Opponents argue that Title IX destabilizes college athletics because it is a "mandated quota system," requiring the reduction or elimination of some men's teams, such as swimming, cross country, tennis, and wrestling, to compensate for the costs of newly formed women's teams and programs. Another popular argument stems from the claim that gender equity is unreasonable, due to the fact that female students do not demonstrate interest in sports in adequate numbers to justify increased spending (Bryjak, 2000). However, one proponent of Title IX, law professor Robert C. Farrell, counters:

It is hard to have a high level of interest in a sports program that does not exist...Whenever well-organized, well-funded, and well-promoted athletic opportunities have been made available to women, women's interest in athletics has flourished (Bryjak, 2000, p.3).

Despite continued resistance, it is clear that girls' and women's participation in sports has grown tremendously in the 30 years since Title IX became law, and predictably, this growth will continue into the future. However, while much progress has been made, there is still a long way to go before it can be said that men and women are truly afforded equal opportunities in sports, and full compliance with Title IX has been met.

The tensions in women's sporting experience during the latter half of the twentieth century were illustrated in the "Hero" ads. The fact that this advertising campaign targeted women as its primary audience indicated the changing trends in women's athletics that occurred since Title IX; this also revealed hope and promise for the directions in which women's sports were headed. The increasing level of participation in women's sport that occurred as a result of Title IX, along with the resistance and struggle that accompanied this growth, served as important themes that connected each of the ads in this campaign. By inviting the reader to reflect on her own experiences with these tensions as a woman athlete, Nike began the process of opening a dialogue with some readers in the audience.

Second Wave Feminism

For me feminism is, more than any other single thing, not a movement, not a cause, not a revolution, but rather a profoundly new way of interpreting human experience. It is a vital piece of information at the center of a new point of reference from which one both reinterprets the past and predicts the future (Vivian Gornick, as quoted in Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, p.83).

Without question, the issue of women in sports in the 20th century is intricately interwoven with feminist values and ideology. As Stephanie Twin, editor of *Out of the bleachers: Writings on women and sport*, wrote, “Today’s women’s movement has revived sports as a feminist issue” (1979, p. xxxvi); today, twenty-three years later, this statement still rings true. Accordingly, to evaluate the current status of women’s participation in sport and the scholarly work surrounding this area, one must also examine the basic tenets of Second Wave feminism to show their implications for how we examine and understand this issue.

Between 1960 and the present, a second wave of the women’s liberation movement has evolved, resulting in an unprecedented, direct attack on the subordination of women in all facets of American society. As women have increasingly become aware of their ability to use their own voices to define who they are and what opportunities, roles, and rights they are entitled to, new variations of feminism have emerged and contributed to the ongoing discussion and debate about women’s identity. Not unlike the first era of activism, the movements of second wave feminism stem from a variety of

sources, seek manifold goals, and pursue distinct rhetorical forms and strategies (Wood, 2001, 1997). As Boutilier and San Giovanni (1983) note:

Just as there exist different orientations toward sport, each with its selective preferences and interpretations, so too, there exist different models of feminism, each with her unique image of woman, a set of explanations for the source of her oppression as a personal and social being, and a vision of her participation in a society that will enhance her potential for self-fulfillment and genuine equality (p. 12).

Feminism has never been, and will undoubtedly never be, a movement that is unified in theory and action. Moreover, in its current state, feminism only continues to become more diverse and contradictory. While some participants see the intramovement differences as a potential distraction, many argue that these distinctions complement one another in ways that actually function to strengthen the movement as a whole (Wood, 2001, 1997; Freeman, 1995, 1975; hooks, 1984).

From its earliest stages, the second wave of the feminist movement developed from two origins: the women's rights branch, otherwise called "liberal feminism," and the women's liberation branch, more commonly known as "radical feminism." While both branches were similar insofar as they were comprised of mostly white, college-educated, middle-class participants, their differences were significant. Because liberal and radical feminism emerged from two different strata of society, with notable distinctions in style, structure, and ideology, one could claim that there were actually two unrelated movements of the second wave, which began to converge during the mid-1970's (Freeman, 1995).

Together, liberal and radical branches of feminism have contributed directly to the current situation of women in sports, albeit through different methods and ideologies. Liberal feminists have worked to provide equal opportunities for women to participate in sports through legal means, and are largely responsible for the implementation of Title IX. Through the strategy of consciousness raising, radical feminism has enabled sporting women to develop and articulate an awareness of the structural oppression that is reflected through their personal experiences of gender discrimination within the realm of athletics (as well as outside of it, of course). The influence of both feminist strands can be seen in Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women.

Liberal Feminism

The first formally recognized organization of the new feminist movement was the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was founded on June 30, 1966 (Wood, 1997; Ferree and Hess, 1994). With the establishment of NOW, the women's rights branch of the feminist movement was born. Many of NOW's originators and participants were older, professional women (and some men) who were trained in and experienced with traditional means of political action; as a result, the strategies of liberal feminism are deeply rooted within the existing political system, albeit not always as a conscious decision (Freeman, 1995, 1975).

The ideology of women's rights was based on a framework that identified the source of women's oppression as the lack of equality in civil rights and educational opportunities for women (Wood, 1997; Jaggar and Struhl, 1978; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983). Generally speaking, liberals believed that discrimination based on sex could be eliminated through reform within the current social structures in the United

States (although there were certainly exceptions, in which the nature of liberal feminism appeared to be more radical than reformist). This reform could be achieved, claimed women's rights advocates, by extending the same political, educational, and legal opportunities to women as were offered to men (Whittier, 1995; Boutilier and San Giovanni, 1983; Jaggar and Struhl, 1978).

Simply stated, the goal of liberal feminism was to wage a political battle through political means. Thus, its participants mainly used such rhetorical strategies as organizing conventions to develop plans and strategies, drafting legislation, lobbying, mass media, and speaking in public forums (Wood, 1997; Whittier, 1995; Ferree and Hess, 1994). Proponents of women's rights sought equal opportunities for women to participate in the structures of American society that were already in place, and focused their energies on legal and economic problems and issues. Consequently, this branch of the movement was instrumental in identifying and fighting against institutional laws and practices that excluded women from influential positions in both professional and public spheres. NOW's efforts have resulted in substantial changes in policies and laws in the United States, which has succeeded in at least partially increasing women's opportunities and protecting their rights (Wood, 1997).

The women's rights branch was comprised mostly of formal, highly structured organizations that were coordinated by elected officers and boards of directors, and maintained through written bylaws and paid memberships. It is possible that the structured style of liberal feminism has actually inhibited its ability to attract a truly diverse following. Due to its formal organization and democratic procedures, one could argue that liberal feminism privileged women with a higher socioeconomic status and

educational background. The majority of women who have traditionally served in leadership positions with the women's rights movement have been well-educated professionals. It is worth noting that, despite the political gains that have been made by liberal feminist organizations, this style of leadership also had drawbacks. Because the viewpoints that are represented by liberal leadership are somewhat limited, the capacity of liberal feminist theory to be inclusive of the perspectives of all women, from all walks of life, was undoubtedly limited, as well.

One of NOW's legislative achievements, which is relevant to Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign, was the addition of Title IX to the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX has directly contributed to the enormous growth of women's opportunities in sports and fitness within the last thirty years (Nelson, 1994). As a result, there currently exists in the United States for the first time a generation of young women who have always had the option to play sports, and for whom opportunities to participate in athletics have been more closely matched with those of their male counterparts.

Radical Feminism

Unknown to NOW and other women's rights organizations, younger women, all under the age of thirty, were simultaneously beginning to form a movement of their own (Freeman, 1995, 1975; Whittier, 1995; Echols, 1989). The younger branch of the New Feminist Movement is inextricably linked in its origins to numerous social-action projects of the 1960's, such as the New Left, the peace movement, and the civil rights movement (Freeman, 1995, 1975; Ferree and Hess, 1994). Through active involvement in the predominant social movements of the day, which emphasized the importance of human rights and equality, women were developing an increasing awareness of their own

status in a patriarchal social system, as well as a burgeoning sense of personal power. However, with this consciousness came the realization that, if women were to pursue feminist ideals, it must be through a movement of their own.

Although they were working alongside their male peers, completing as much work and risking the same hazards as men, it soon became clear that women were not valued as equals within the organizations of the New Left, civil rights, and peace movements (Wood, 1997; Ferree and Hess, 1994; Echols, 1989). While men kept firm control of movement leadership, women were expected to take on secondary roles, such as making coffee, organizing protests on a local level, and typing memos and press releases, all the while being seen as sexual conquests (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Echols, 1989; Freeman, 1975). When women began to question their restricted power in social protest organizations, as well as society at large, they faced ridicule, exclusion, and abuse. The first signs of women's discontent within the civil rights movement occurred in 1964 and 1965, when women in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) argued for female equality, and were met with oppositional, sexist attitudes (Wood, 1997). It was becoming painfully obvious that, although movement men advocated social justice and egalitarian principles, many of these same men demonstrated a blatant disregard for women through their actions.

As Jo Freeman notes,

The situation in which these women found themselves unavoidably conflicted with the ideologies of "participatory democracy," "freedom," and "justice" that they were expressing. They were faced with the

self-evident contradiction of working in a “freedom movement” but not being very free (1975, p. 57).

This contradiction between theory and practice contributed directly to the development of radical feminist ideology and the organization of women’s groups. Consequently, the women’s liberation branch of the second wave began to form, with the existence of approximately ninety different radical feminist groups in the United States by 1969 (Rosenberg, 1992).

Contrary to the methods of the women’s rights strand, women’s liberation was comprised entirely of a mass base, with no national organization. Although there eventually came to be thousands of radical chapters nationwide, which were linked by newsletters, journals, and coordinating committees, all existed independently of one another (Whittier, 1995; Ferree and Hess, 1994; Freeman, 1975). This organizational style was intentional, and was developed in reaction to the male style of leadership that most radical women had experienced through the social-action movements. Therefore, women’s liberation was inspired by a vision of internal democracy and mutual empowerment which, it was believed, would enable an authentic women’s style to surface (Whittier, 1995; Ferree and Hess, 1994; Donovan, 1993). Because the younger branch prided itself on its lack of formal structure and leadership, the growth of radical feminism was “more amoebic than organized” (Freeman, 1995, p. 515).

Radical feminists had adopted from the New Left an inherent mistrust for existing institutions, and thus chose to engage in the struggle for women’s liberation using more experimental methods, outside of the traditional political system (Freeman, 1995). Experience with social-action movements had equipped radical women with a variety of

resources, which prepared them for creative activism in pursuit of feminist goals.

Women had become familiar with such invaluable tactics as civil disobedience, mass demonstrations, manipulating the media, and passive resistance, all of which were implemented into radical feminist strategy (Ferree and Hess, 1994). In addition, the initiators of the radical branch had obtained years of experience in local community organizing, and were able to utilize the New Left's infrastructure of organization and media to their advantage (Freeman, 1995). They used their experience and knowledge of the underground press and free universities in order to educate others, and promote ideas of women's liberation.

Radical feminists were the most important branch of women's liberation for the development of theory. Radicals believed that the source of women's oppression was a deeply rooted sexism, which they considered to be historically the earliest and most fundamental form of oppression, as well as the most difficult to eradicate (Wood, 1997; Dow, 1995; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983). They viewed their top priority as improving opportunities for women, and believed that when the subjugation of women was removed from society, through a "radical transformation of both personal and social existence" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983, p. 16), that the result would be the collapse of capitalism (Freeman, 1995; Donovan, 1992; Echols, 1989; hooks, 1984).

While radicals often agreed with the issues identified by liberal feminists, they were concerned with the development of inclusive, theoretical frameworks in order to articulate the political nature of sexism, and to explore far-reaching solutions. Radical feminist theorizing was based on the argument that, although equal rights and opportunities for women are essential, they cannot create a positive impact when

introduced into a society that retains a high level of economic structure and prejudice. Those women who are uneducated, poor, lesbian, physically disabled, or members of minority groups are less likely to possess the necessary resources in order to grasp these equal opportunities, and claim their rights. Radical feminists argued that changes in the law, while important, could not eliminate these deeply rooted prejudices from society. Rather, they believed that the answer could be found through more basic changes in peoples' consciousness, as well as the structure of social and cultural life (Whittier, 1995; hooks, 1984; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983; Jaggar and Struhl, 1978).

A great deal of radical feminist theorizing took place within the context of consciousness raising groups (Brownmiller, 1999; Wood, 2001; Donovan, 1993; MacKinnon, 1989). A primary radical communication technique, these groups were established to enable women to interact within an intentionally unstructured situation, for the purpose of shifting the participants' gendered concept of self, as well as perceptions about society in general. For many women, these "rap groups," as they came to be called, provided an initial contact with acknowledged feminist ideas. Jo Freeman states:

Women come together in small groups to share personal experiences, problems, and feelings. From this public sharing comes the realization that what was thought to be individual is in fact common; that what was thought to be a personal problem has a social cause and a political solution (1975, p. 118).

As they exchanged accounts of their experiences with sexism, women were able to see the patterns of commonality between their individual experiences. They began to understand the degree to which their opportunities, attitudes, and even self-concepts had

been shaped and created by gender socialization. This realization allowed women to identify, at least in part, the structural causes of their oppression, and contributed to a deeply personal change in attitude. Consciousness raising groups became powerful instruments that enabled women to create a new interpretation of themselves and the events that surrounded them. To this end, Freeman notes, “Most women find this experience both irreversible and contagious. Once one has gone through such a ‘resocialization,’ one’s view of oneself and the world is never the same again...” (1975, p. 118).

Women also developed a profound awareness that this insight into their private circumstances had far-reaching social and political implications (Brownmiller, 1999; Wood, 1997; MacKinnon, 1989; Ruth, 1989; Freeman, 1975). As discussed by Catherine MacKinnon (1989), “The key to feminist theory consists in its *way* of knowing. Consciousness raising is that way” (p. 165). This growing realization of the connection between women’s private experiences with gendered oppression and the social practices in which they were situated resulted in a saying that became one of the central tenets of radical feminist theory: “*The personal is political*” (Ruth, 1989). Personal experiences often became a point of entry for feminist awareness, activism, and change.

Although consciousness raising in the second wave traditionally took place within groups that were organized specifically for this purpose, one could argue that this process is not necessarily confined to the context of a small group (Campbell, 1973). By definition, feminist consciousness raising occurs when an event or an act of rhetorical communication initiates a thoughtful examination of one’s previously held attitudes, leading to an understanding of the relationship between those attitudes and the current

system of dominant social beliefs. Thus, the development of a feminist consciousness is a process of learning to make visible the realities of women's gendered lives, which had previously been invisible. Because it is ultimately an individual process, consciousness raising may or may not occur in the physical presence of other women. That is, women's voices as heard through such mediums as novels, articles, paintings, films, songs, 'zines, internet, television programs, poems, plays, and advertisements also have the potential to become a "presence" to other women; these various media provide another valuable context in which the process of consciousness raising may begin to unfold.

Although radical feminism's loose structure prevented any kind of direct, organized influence on the shaping of public policy, its impact on the development of the feminist movement as a whole was significant. Radical theorizing, developed in part through the process of consciousness raising, produced an awareness of numerous issues and led to the development of new ideological perspectives. The implementation of new and creative techniques to promote individual and social change could be considered another lasting contribution (Freeman, 1995).

Liberal and radical feminism seemed to work in conjunction with one another, albeit unintentionally. While radical feminism's strong point was evidenced in its ability to change individual attitudes and attract a larger following to the movement, its lack of formal organization proved to be damaging. The structure of the liberal branch allowed for the coordination of nationwide action and political influence, while detracting from its ability to attract a diverse and widespread membership. To some extent, the strengths of each compensated for the weaknesses of the other, and enabled lasting changes to be made.

Third Wave Feminism

We're not doing feminism the same way that the seventies feminists did it; being liberated doesn't mean copying what came before but finding one's own way—a way that is genuine to one's own generation (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, p. 130)

Since the early 1990's, young "Generation X"-age women have begun to publicly acknowledge their dissatisfaction with certain aspects of second wave feminism. Similar to the generations of women that have preceded them, young feminists believe they have been influenced by the unique circumstances and events of their time, and subsequently many feel that they cannot relate with or are being ignored by women's organizations founded by the second wave (Wood, 2001; Gilmore, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Tobias, 1997). Not unlike the feminists of the second wave, young feminists have expressed their views and activism through a wide variety of methods. Some young women have been radically outspoken, through media such as 'zines, punk music, public rallies, and the Internet, about their frustration that the issues relevant to their generation have not been acknowledged by the second wave. Other young feminists have taken a less confrontational approach, and have simply chosen to live out the feminist values of independence, self-reliance, and confidence that were, essentially, their "birthright" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000). Collectively, the activism, perspectives, theories, lifestyles, and voices of these young feminists have come to be known as the third wave of the feminist movement (Gilmore, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Findlen, 1995).

As a result of the tireless efforts, activism, and sacrifice of previous generations, third wave feminists have inherited the feminist legacy, which has prepared young women to expect equality. Write Baumgardner and Richards, “Born with feminism simply in the water, the Third Wave is buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism” (2000, p. 83). Consequently, one of the most important characteristics of third wave feminism is a sense of entitlement (Singley, 2002; Gilmore, 2001; Orr, 1997; Findlen, 1995). Younger feminists have the distinct advantage of having grown up during a time in which feminism has already been established and has made a significant impact on American society. Findlen explains, “The legacy of feminism was for me a sense of entitlement...We are the first generation for whom feminism has been entwined in the fabric of our lives; it is natural that many of us are feminists” (1995, p. xii). This is illustrated by the manner in which feminist ideals are interwoven into the expectations of young girls and women in the United States. For example, many young girls do not question whether or not they will be allowed to be doctors, play Little League baseball, run a marathon, or support themselves financially; countless young women not only expect that they can do these things, but they are already doing them.

Many second wave activists, social movement theorists, and historians are reluctant to recognize third wave feminism as a legitimate, meaningful movement (Singley, 2002; Gilmore, 2001, Tobias, 1997; Douglas, 1995; Findlen, 1995). Much of this discussion centers around the concern that younger women are either ignoring feminism or consciously choosing not to identify themselves as feminists (“I am not a

feminist, but...”). Younger feminists are quick to point out that this is not necessarily the case:

Young feminists are constantly told that we don’t exist. It’s a refrain heard from older feminists as well as in the popular media: “Young women don’t consider themselves feminists.” Actually, a lot of us do. And many more of us have integrated feminist values into our lives, whether or not we choose to use the label “feminist” (Findlen, 1995, p. xiv).

While the third wave has been influenced by the sense of entitlement that the successes of second wave feminism have provided, the fact that it has also been shaped by the backlash against feminism that has been provoked by those very successes is also an important point to consider. This may explain, at least in part, the hesitation of some young feminists to label themselves as such.

Some third wave feminists go on to argue that, in actuality, the fact that many young women are integrating feminist values into their lives without necessarily choosing the “feminist” label is a sign that feminism is alive and well (Gilmore, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Findlen, 1995). States Findlen, “This is an important barometer of the impact of feminism, since feminism is a movement for social change—not an organization doing a membership drive” (1995, p. xiv).

Another critical distinction of third wave feminist ideology is the concept of multiplicity, which is consistent with the characterization of “Generation X” (Singley, 2002; Shugart, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Orr, 1997; Findlen, 1995). Known for its disunity and inability to be easily categorized, this generation of young women has integrated such ideals into its theory of feminism. Central to third wave

ideology is the belief that women's roles are fluid rather than fixed, that contradictions are to be embraced, and that seemingly inconsistent political viewpoints can coexist (Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein, 2001). This is evident in the way many third wavers have chosen to incorporate the complexities of their personal identity, beliefs, and values into their feminism, at the risk of being viewed as hypocrites when judged by the standards of the Second Wave (Gilmore, 2001). Many young feminists have continued to participate in practices deemed "unfeminist" by second wavers—wearing high heels and dresses; getting married and assuming the last name of their husband; shaving leg and armpit hair; joining the military; wearing makeup—while *also* claiming to possess distinctly feminist ideals, values, consciousness, and theory (Gilmore, 2001).

Baumgardner and Richards further explain this point of view:

You don't have to make the feminine powerful by making it masculine or "natural;" it is a feminist statement to proudly claim things that are feminine, and the alternative can mean to destroy who we are. *You were raised on Barbie and soccer? That's cool* (2000, p. 135).

In both action and attitude, many third wavers live out their belief that they should not be forced to conform to a singular feminist identity that does not allow them to bring the diversity of their personal history, individuality, and uniqueness to the table. Third wave ideology not only strives to incorporate the contradictions and complexities of women as individuals, but also values the inclusion of differences between women of a variety of abilities, sexual orientations, ethnicities, appearances, and backgrounds (Singley, 2002; Shugart, 2001; Wood, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Orr, 1997; Findlen, 1995). Wood writes, "This rising generation of feminists is figuring out

how to speak about and for women, while simultaneously recognizing differences within the group” (2001, p. 84). Although there is no such thing as one particular young feminist perspective, the reality is that there is no such thing as one particular “feminist” perspective; third wavers celebrate this plurality of visions as not only a strength, but as an essential element of their feminist ideology.

Because of its emphasis on the practical application of feminism to our everyday lives, third wave ideology can be described as more experiential and action-oriented than theoretical (Wood, 2001; Findlen, 1995). Young feminists have chosen to build upon the theoretical emphasis of the second wave, in order to make informed decisions about how to live out the reality of feminism in their lives. Recognizing the uniqueness of each woman’s experience, and using women’s personal experiences with sexism as a starting point for political action, third wavers aspire to include a multiplicity of perspectives into a practical application of feminism to everyday life (Singley, 2002; Gilmore, 2001; Wood, 2001; Orr, 1997; Findlen, 1995). This strategy is not new, of course; it is simply a continuation of the second wave’s efforts of consciousness raising and integration of individual differences into feminist points of view.

While feminism for the second wave was apparent in the politics of the times, the third wave’s feminism is culture-driven and media-savvy (Singley, 2002; Baumgardner and Richards, 2001; Alfonso and Trigilio, 1997; Orr, 1997; Findlen, 1995). Notes Singley, “Today younger women live in a world that is more corporatized than politicized, more driven by media icons than by methods of consciousness-raising” (2002, p. 456). Young feminists have grown up in an environment that has been thoroughly saturated by messages from television, movies, pop music, newspapers, music

videos, Internet, magazines, and advertising. As a result of this constant bombardment of stimuli, argues Singley, young feminists, “may demonstrate an evolved ability to hold myriad images and representations in the mind simultaneously” (2002, p. 459). In other words, many 9/*6+

third wavers have developed the distinct ability to interpret the multiplicity of media images through a critical lens, sorting through the contradictions in an informed and discerning manner.

Because young women’s perspectives have been significantly shaped and impacted by the cultural changes that have already occurred through feminism, the priorities of the third wave feminist agenda are similar as well as somewhat different from those of the second wave. Relevant issues for both second and third wavers include: sexual violence against women; sexual harassment; young women’s reproductive rights; body image; teen pregnancy; affordable health care for poor women; and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender issues and rights. Some of the causes and issues of particular significance for young feminists are: voter registration; becoming women in sports; better sex education for youth; eating disorders; and becoming women in rock/punk music (Gilmore, 2001; Goldman, Heath, and Smith, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Tobias, 1997; Findlen, 1995).

Although the contexts of society and personal experience may be different, third wavers are drawn to feminism for reasons that are similar to those of their predecessors. However, the charge of young feminists is to look back in appreciation for the heritage and contributions of the first and second waves, while also looking ahead and planning for the ways in which feminism must evolve, adapt, and change in response to the

relevant needs and issues of today's generation of women (Gilmore, 2001; Findlen, 1995).

The influence of both second and third wave feminism can be seen in Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women. The fundamental values and ideals that are shared by second and third wavers, such as equality and justice, control over one's own body, self-definition, and personal freedom are promoted in the message of this campaign. Due to the political and legislative efforts of liberal feminism, young women have been given tremendous opportunities in athletics that were simply not available to many women prior to the second wave of the feminist movement. However, these opportunities have also carried with them a significant amount of contradiction and tension. While Title IX legislation has been in effect for the past thirty years, and the increase in the level of participation in girls' and women's athletics has been rapid and significant, the accompanying changes in societal norms and attitudes have occurred much more slowly. In other words, the process of creating equality between men and women in the realm of athletics has been much more easily and efficiently enacted in theory than in practice. This issue is a central theme throughout the "Hero" advertising campaign.

Several third wave themes are also particularly significant with regard to both the message and the critical analysis of the "Hero" campaign. The third wave theme of multiplicity and complexity of feminist perspectives provides important insight for understanding the rhetor's message. Nike promotes a perspective in which the reader is encouraged to develop her own, inclusive rules for what it means to be fit, feminine, beautiful, and a hero, rather than accepting society's outdated standards. Also, the

individualistic stance that marks the third wave, along with its emphasis on the practical application and “living out” of feminism in everyday life, is an important theme in “Hero.” Through this campaign, Nike encourages the reader to learn about herself, her society, and her brand of feminism through her bodily experiences of participating in some form of sport or fitness activity.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In the first chapter of this thesis, I discussed the manner in which advertising, as a form of rhetoric, both reflects and creates cultural values. I then focused on one particular set of print advertisements, Nike’s “Hero” advertising campaign for women. I first described Nike’s “Just Do It” advertising campaign, in which the “Hero” ads are situated, and gave some background information about both the Nike corporation and the origination of the “Hero” campaign. I then discussed the relevant pieces of the historical and cultural contexts upon which the message of these ads has been built. I gave an overview of women’s sports in the United States in the twentieth century, and I specifically focused on the ways in which Title IX has significantly impacted women’s participation in sports, as well as societal attitudes about the same. Next, I provided a review of both liberal and radical branches of second wave feminism, and discussed the contributions of each strand to the advancement of women’s sports. I then described third wave feminism, and discussed several relevant third wave themes, including multiplicity of perspectives and individualism, which I build upon throughout my analysis.

In Chapter Two, I begin with a discussion of the ways in which the cultural norms of femininity have created for women a “fear of being too much,” which I examine more

specifically within the context of women in sports. I then review the critical lenses of body feminism and identification theory, which I use as my methodology for analysis in chapter three.

In the third chapter of this paper, I begin my analysis with a discussion of media's interest in containing feminism, and I discuss the significance of media's attempts to create a "feminist consumer." Next, I further my discussion of the theory of polysemy, and I describe the multiple audiences that were targeted by Nike through the "Hero" advertisements. Building on several previously discussed themes, tensions, and common experiences of women athletes as a framework for analysis, I illustrate the ways in which feminism is simultaneously promoted and constrained through Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women. I argue that by infusing both feminist and traditionally feminine views into the "Hero" ads, Nike is purposefully inviting varied readings of the text from different members of the audience. I then discuss the implications of these varied interpretations within the context of multiple audiences, ranging from strong feminists to those who are unaware of feminism, and I argue that the ads have the potential to function as a device of consciousness raising for some members of the audience.

In Chapter Four, the concluding chapter, I assert that despite the subtle constraints present in these ads, Nike's "Hero" campaign reflects the potential and promise for one type of advertising, social movement advertising, to be used to promote social change in an unconventional way. I then discuss the implications of this argument for third wave feminism, and I describe the current situation of advertising for women in sports. I close with a discussion of directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

A FEAR OF BEING “TOO MUCH”

The way women in our culture have been socialized to relate to their bodies, and the subsequent characterization of women's bodies in our society, are deeply problematic (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1971, p. 4, in Hayden, 1997, p. 137).

Males are socialized to use their bodies to please themselves, while females are socialized to use their bodies to please others (Dorothy Harris, in Cohen, 1993, p. 215).

The body is not only a direct medium and text of culture, but it is also, as anthropologist Pierre Bordieu, philosopher Michel Foucault, and many others have argued, a “*practical* direct locus of control” (Bordo, 1989, p. 13, emphasis in the original). Since the late 1960's and early 1970's, the objectification of the female body has been a serious political issue, and this issue continues to permeate our culture and society today. The cultural norms of ‘femininity,’ “learning to please visually and sexually through the practices of the body—media imagery, beauty pageants, high heels, girdles, make-up, simulated orgasm”—are seen as an essential component in the maintenance of gender domination (Bordo, 1989, p. 27). Women are socialized from a young age to control and constrain their bodies through mannerisms that are considered distinctly feminine: they are taught to stand, sit, walk, talk, gesture, throw, and carry themselves “like a girl.” Society couches these constraining rules of femininity within the positives of being “small,” “delicate,” “petite,” and “graceful.” Young girls and

women are routinely complimented when they fit neatly (or squeeze themselves) into these categories, and are simultaneously reprimanded for being “unladylike,” “butch,” “overbearing,” or even “bitchy” when they forget (or choose to ignore) the rules.

Athletic women are not beyond the scope of these cultural norms of femininity. Traditionally “manly” qualities, such as aggression and competition, physical strength and muscularity, are said to detract from a woman’s charm and femininity. For this reason, athletic women, particularly at the collegiate and professional levels, have often gone to great lengths to avoid being labeled as “masculine” (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Shugart, 2003; Balsamo, 1994; Birrell and Theberge, 1994; Cahn, 1994; Nelson, 1994; MacNeill, 1988). Magazines feature articles about woman athletes, frequently counterbalancing images of an athlete in action with shots of her posing in traditionally feminine garb: a form-fitting dress or skirt; high heels; picture-perfect hair and make-up; complete with long, painted fingernails. Media consultants instruct collegiate and professional female basketball players in the art of dressing and behaving in “feminine” ways in order to counteract their “unfeminine” behavior on the court (Cahn, 1994; Nelson, 1994). Olympic gold medallist Florence Griffith Joyner, affectionately dubbed “Flo-Jo,” gained international fame and recognition not only for her enormous accomplishments on the track, but also for her six-inch long, intricately painted fingernails, long, flowing hair, and “lingerie”-type bodysuits. The message that American society sends to both athletic and non-athletic women is clear: if you are aggressive, you must also be gracious; if you are competitive, you must also be demure; if you are strong, you must also be soft. This media focus on women athletes as sex objects implies an inferior status, and works to erode the physical and symbolic

empowerment that women gain through participation in athletics (Shugart, 2003; Birrell and Theberge, 1994; Cohen, 1993; Sabo and Messner, 1993).

Sandra Bartky (1988, 1998) and Susan Bordo (1988, 1997) have discussed the ways in which this traditional conception of femininity has led women to develop, in essence, a fear of being “too much.” The significant gender differences in the socialization of posture, gesture, movement, and overall bodily comportment cause women to be more physically restricted and constrained than men, both in terms of body movement and spatiality. In their mannerisms and nonverbal communication behaviors, women have been taught to contract the space they occupy by making themselves “small and narrow, harmless” (Bartky, 1988, p. 67).

Young describes this phenomenon by saying:

...a space seems to surround women in imagination that they are hesitant to move beyond: this manifests itself both in a reluctance to reach, stretch, and extend the body to meet resistances of matter in motion—as in sport or in the performance of physical tasks—and in a typically constrained posture and general style of movement. Women’s space is not a field in which her body intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined (1990).

Often-heard phrases such as, “You throw *like a girl*,” “You run *like a girl*,” or “You hit *like a girl*” speak to Young’s description of this issue of women’s “space.” These comments suggest that the majority of girls do not tend to execute bodily movements fully—indeed, one could argue that, after socialization takes root, women no longer know or remember how to move their bodies freely. Young asserts that these patterns of

restricted movement and spatiality are socially constructed, through practices and discourses that encourage women to experience their own bodies passively, as objects for others to gaze and act upon (Young, 1990).

It is important to note that these comments contain an underlying negative and even derogatory tone; that is, if one is told, “You are acting like such a *girl!*” he or she is being insulted rather than complemented. It becomes painfully obvious that women’s typical body language is clearly a language of subordination and inferiority when these “rules” of movement are enacted by a man in a male status hierarchy (Bartky, 1988; Henley, 1977). Yet the majority of American women are socialized to keep themselves small by being rewarded for being “ladylike,” tentative, and holding back, in addition to being chastised for being too loud, too large, overbearing, or obnoxious when they begin to claim their own power and presence in the world.

This confusion and fear of taking up space can manifest itself in a multitude of ways, from feelings of self-doubt and low self-confidence to a distorted body image, and possibly even to eating disorders (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003). Bordo (1997) writes:

...if the thin body represents a triumph over need and want, a stripping down to some clear, distinct, essence of the self, fat represents just the opposite—the shame of being too present, too hungry, too overbearing, too needy, overflowing with unsightly desire, or simply “too much” (p. 130).

Thus, it is not necessarily *taking up space* or *being fat* that American women are afraid of, but it is what these states *represent*. Society sends women mixed messages that leave her in a double bind, and she doesn’t know quite how she is supposed to “be.” To this end, one third wave feminist, who is anorexic, writes,

Gazing in the mirror at my emaciated body, I observed a woman held up by her culture as the physical ideal because she was starving, self-obsessed, and powerless, a woman called beautiful because she threatened no one except herself (Chernik, 1995, p. 81).

When examined through this lens, the significant drop in the self-esteem of girls as they approach adolescence is neither surprising nor difficult to comprehend. As Mary Pipher asserts in *Reviving Ophelia*, young girls become confused by all of the contradictory messages and “rules” of society:

Be beautiful, but beauty is only skin deep. Be sexy, but not sexual.

Be honest, but don’t hurt anyone’s feelings. Be independent, but be nice.

Be smart, but not so smart that you threaten boys (1994, pp. 35-36).

Cultural pressure from schools, magazines, television, movies, advertisements, and especially peers forces girls to disown their true selves in order to assume false selves, indeed to become “‘female impersonators’ who fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces” (Pipher, 1994, p. 22). Subsequently, a woman learns at an early age to become alienated from her body, and to experience her own body as a thing or an object that is separate from her self (Trethewey, 1999; Hayden, 1997). Young adds to this argument, “The objectified bodily existence accounts for the self-consciousness of the feminine in relation to her body and the resulting distance she takes from her body” (1990, p. 155).

While the rules for women today are not quite as strict as they were even twenty years ago, there are still outdated notions about femininity that exist which create “glass ceilings” that function to hold women back even as their overall situation improves (Bordo, 1997). Chernik argues,

As long as society resists female power, fashion will call healthy women physically flawed. As long as society accepts the physical, sexual, and economic abuse of women, popular culture will prefer women who resemble little girls (1995, p. 81).

As women are finding their voices and demanding more entry into and control of public space, the beauty standards of idealized femininity have become less and less attainable.

BODY FEMINISM

Knowledge is born with one's experience of oneself...it is by paying attention to one's body that one generates knowledge. It is by paying attention to one's experience that one comes to know.

(Hayden, 1997, p. 140)

The essence of being radical is physical.

(Foucault, in Bordo, 1997, p. 191)

In her analysis of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective's book series, entitled *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971-1992), Sara Hayden (1997) discovered an epistemological stance taken by the collective in their writings which led to an alternative process of feminist theorizing, which I refer to as body feminism. In the development of this argument, Hayden found that the collective began with an observation that American society tends not only to separate the physical and the mental into two independent entities, but it also places more value and emphasis on the mental sphere than the physical. The separation of mind and body in traditional Western society is illustrated by the polarization of the humanities and the sciences at universities today. While the

humanities are chiefly concerned with the “pure,” disembodied mind, the sciences have reduced their experimental study to that of mindless bodies (Bordo, 1997; Hall, 1996).

Women in Western societies, who have traditionally been defined as “more or less mindless,” are equated with the “base” body; a “base” object is not considered valuable, and thus women “grow up ignorant, misinformed, unprepared” (BWHBC, 1971, p.4, in Hayden, 1997, p. 137). Women live out an estrangement from their bodies; we *are* the body and are hardly allowed to be much else, yet we must also exist in a permanent state of distance from our physical selves, in a posture of complete disapproval (Bartky, 1998). Until the last twenty-five years, mainstream society has taken advantage of (and actually intensified) this situation by discouraging women from training their bodies or participating in athletics, sending a none-too-subtle message that a well-muscled and athletic woman was unfeminine, and even “dykey” (Nelson, 1994; Cahn, 1994; Griffin, 1993; Sabo and Messner, 1993).

Women’s bodies have been further objectified and exploited through the use of body parts in advertisements to sell products (Cortese, 1999; Hayden, 1997; Wolf, 1991). It is not at all uncommon to page through a magazine today and see: a woman’s hands in an ad for liquid dish detergent; eyes in an ad for glasses or contacts; hair shaped into objects such as a martini olive, fireworks, or a pagoda in an effort to promote hair styling products; legs and derriere in an advertisement for jeans, a car, a type of beer or alcohol, or perfume; and breasts being used to sell just about anything imaginable. Some critics also note that by focusing on parts of the body and producing muscle-isolating machines, the technology of the fitness industry has further served to produce the body as a

conglomeration of isolated and fragmented parts; accordingly, the body has become an object that is to be managed and worked on (Birrell and Thebirge, 1994).

This alienation from and objectification of their bodies has caused women to be “stripped of the right and the ability to make claims about themselves” (Hayden, 1997, p. 138). Therefore, feminist theorists have concluded, for their own sake and for the sake of society as a whole, women need to fight back and to reclaim their bodies as their own. One way of reclaiming this power for women to define their own experiences and their own bodies can be found in the epistemology of body feminism, which privileges personal experiences as a means to achieving understanding (Hayden, 1997; Wilshire, 1989). This alternative feminist theory integrates body and mind by emphasizing the knowledge and self-definition that is discovered through a woman’s personal experiences; therefore, body feminism challenges general societal efforts to define women and their bodies according to traditional gendered norms and notions of “femininity” (Hayden, 1997; Frye, 1993; Harding, 1990). Wilshire (1989) adds:

If we are to know in new and better ways, we must also acquaint ourselves with the so-far bypassed knowledge in our bodies, not just our minds.

Actually, I wish to suggest that we let *our bodies take the lead in the new learning*” (p. 109).

The epistemology of body feminism contradicts the vast majority of Western intellectual tradition, which is based on the assumption that knowledge based on disembodied reason is of the highest value (Hayden, 1997; Bordo, 1989; Wilshire, 1989). While this line of thought was first introduced by Plato in his *Thaetetus*, it became more deeply rooted in Western tradition through Descartes’ *Meditations*. Descartes’ goal was

to cleanse his cognition from the “untrustworthy” influence of his bodily senses. Thus, the epistemology of Western thought has strived toward a goal of discovering the world through a “single, disembodied, objective lens” (Hayden, 1997, p. 141). The traditional Western epistemological stance has been challenged and criticized by feminist scholars such as Wilshire (1989), Bordo (1989), Harding (1990), Frye (1993), and Hayden (1997), who have argued for an epistemology in its place that is generated by women’s bodily experiences. Hayden (1997) writes:

Figuratively speaking, an epistemology based on personal experience
Flips Descartes on his head. Rather than arguing “I think, therefore I
am,” this feminist epistemology suggests “I experience, therefore
I know” (p. 141).

Through the epistemological stance of body feminism, women are encouraged to use their personal and bodily experiences as a “starting point” for illuminating and making sense of the realities of their lives (Harding, 1990). For example, one can certainly gain a magnitude of self-understanding and discovery as a result of moving alone to a location that is far from home. Through her personal experiences of living on her own, making her own decisions, supporting herself financially, being a young woman with a career, adjusting to her new surroundings, and establishing her life in a new place, she gains unique knowledge of herself. However, the process of consciousness raising does not end with bodily experience and personal awareness. By comparing her own experiences with those of other women, in addition to comparing her story with established “truths” about what it means to be an independent, self-sufficient woman in a patriarchal culture, a woman is able to begin the process of understanding the greater

social structures and oppressions in which her experiences are situated; she is able to establish the critical connection between the personal and the political.

Authors such as Heide (1978), Twin (1979), and Cook (1998) have argued that sports present a woman with an opportunity to re-claim her physical space. They argue that discovering how to move her body freely through athletics, and learning how to shape and defend her space on the playing field, will enable a woman to develop and maintain the confidence necessary to demand her physical space in other spheres of her life. Twin (1979) writes:

Sport is part of a larger movement for female physical autonomy, a movement in which efforts to gain control over pregnancy, birth, family size, and individual safety figure prominently. As this movement proceeds, athletics may well form its backbone (p. xxxix).

The right to take up physical space in the world is inherent in athletics; participating in sports can enhance girls' and women's sense of a right to emotional space, as well as their right to speak and be heard. This carries with it an enormous potential to counteract the loss of self-esteem that occurs in adolescent girls, as previously discussed. Heide (1978) expands upon this potential with a proposal to consider sports as a "com-test," a vital opportunity to compete *with* (rather than *against*) oneself and others in mutual self-empowerment and growth. In addition to the obvious physical benefits one gains from training her body, a woman is able to learn through sports the valuable lesson of "I can;" that is, she realizes "I can participate, I can develop, I can change my world and the world" (p. 197).

By applying the theory of body feminism to the realm of athletics, I argue that this epistemology clearly connects a woman's physical experiences to the knowledge gained through the intellectual processing of those experiences. Through the process of participating in sports or fitness activities, a woman has the opportunity to reconceptualize her ideals of confidence, strength, independence, beauty, femininity, and "woman's space." As she redefines these ideals through her own experience, and as she consciously compares her personal experiences as a woman and an athlete to the traditional social norms and rules that impact the ways in which she lives out these roles, she begins to realize the inconsistencies and injustices that she encounters on a daily basis. As she begins to share with other women her experiences, thoughts, discoveries, frustrations, and triumphs as a woman and as an athlete, she learns from their experiences as well, and she is able to better clarify the patterns of oppression that are occurring within the structure of her society. By understanding these patterns, as well as the importance of her role in both maintaining and changing the social structure, she is better equipped to learn how to take up her space in her own life and society in ways that will effect positive change.

In re-claiming the knowledge of her own experience and her own body, and by learning to establish the relationship between her physical experience and the influence of her social and political context, a woman is given a "weapon" of sorts which gives her the strength and ability to gain control over her body and ultimately, her life (Hayden, 1997). By discovering this physical integration between the personal and the political, a woman is equipped to make choices in the way she lives her life that are not simply about changing herself, but also directed toward social change.

It is important to note that the theory of body feminism is fundamentally based on the assumption that the differences in life experiences of individual women will certainly lead to differences in knowledge and understanding of oneself. That is, what constitutes “truth” for one woman may not be true for another, according to the filter of each woman’s experience, background, education, cultural identity, and religion, among numerous other factors. As women share their truths with one another in this process, each participant continues to grow, change, and evolve. Consequently, the theorizing that occurs through body feminism is an ongoing process, changing continually as each individual grows and as society as a whole evolves.

Some theorists argue that viewing sports as the answer to the problem of woman’s alienation from her body and fear of being “too much” is problematic. Bordo (1997) has criticized athletic companies, such as Nike, for producing advertisements that use “hyped-up” rhetoric to attempt to transform this structural issue of oppression into a personal issue that can be easily resolved:

Nike has proven to be the master manipulator and metaphor maker in this game. Don’t moan over life’s problems or blame society for holding you back, Nike instructs us. Don’t waste your time berating the “system.” Get down to the gym, pick up those free weights, and turn things around. If it hurts, all the better. No pain, no gain...what counts...is action. *Just Do It* (p. 29).

Heywood and Dworkin (2003) add to this argument:

Despite its triumphant, inspirational rhetoric, the affirmative model Nike and others offer is no magic pill that does away with the reality of

inequitable conditions in a single stroke...issues like the tyranny of ideal bodies don't just vanish when you start to play sports (pp. 38-39).

Indeed, one cannot look at a problem as complex and multi-layered as oppression through the narrow lens of sports and think that there is any one simple solution or answer; to do so would be naïve and irresponsible. In this sense, I agree with Bordo's arguments.

Participation in sports does not always lead to a greater understanding of self and society. Running a marathon, playing basketball, swimming the English channel, lifting weights, or learning karate do not automatically enable a woman to conquer the problems of oppression in her life and her world.

What can empower a woman to at least begin to transform and overcome this problem, however, are the continuous changes in her awareness and attitude that could potentially accompany her participation in these activities. I do not propose that sports are single-handedly the answer to the problem of girls' and women's lack of self-confidence and faith in their abilities. Rather, I assert that by using the physical experience of moving freely and taking up space through athletics as a "starting point," a woman may engage in an ongoing process of coming to know what it means to re-claim her personal space in other areas of her life; ultimately, this process may enable her to make lasting change in the greater social structure, as well.

I argue that the message of the "Hero" campaign had the potential to function as a consciousness raising device for some athletic American women in the audience. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1973, p. 79) noted that the purpose of consciousness raising was "to create awareness through shared experiences that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared" (as cited in Hayden, 1997,

p. 129). The text in the “Hero” ads described unique experiences with oppression that many women, and particularly women athletes, have endured as individuals. I argue that by openly addressing these experiences, the ads created a sense of awareness among some women in the audience that these problems are not individual at all; rather, they stem from greater societal issues. Many women athletes have probably had similar experiences to those that are described in “Hero,” and thus can relate to and identify with the message that the campaign espoused. I would even suggest that it may be a relief for an athletic woman to know that these situations and feelings described in the ads are not endured by her alone, and that her experiences are shared by other women, whose stories are remarkably similar to her own.

Although I acknowledge that Nike’s “Hero” campaign placed constraints on feminism, some of which I will further explore in Chapter 3, I argue that this message ultimately had the potential to promote feminism in ways that were empowering, liberating, and worthwhile. It suggested to the reader that her body could be a site of resistance that was created by her choices, in consultation with others. Bordo says, “There are lots of wells from which to draw an oppositional spirit and project...Sometimes our bodies resist even without our conscious participation” (1997, pp. 190-191). By learning what it means to move her body freely and without constraint, by training in order to develop her body athletically, and by learning through conversations and shared experiences with others, a woman is given the opportunity to become less a pawn of society and stronger in herself. She is physically resisting the cultural norms of beauty and femininity.

Resistance can be produced in many ways, and I am suggesting that the knowledge gained through bodily experience, along with an increased level of consciousness regarding the significance of said experience, is just one avenue that women can use to transform the order of our society. As with any measure of resistance, what is most important about the epistemological stance of body feminism is that it leads women to develop a more oppositional or critical lens through which to examine herself, her actions, and her society, and to understand herself and her world differently as a result. As a result of this enhanced awareness and understanding, she may then learn how to effect lasting social change within the greater context, as well.

IDENTIFICATION THEORY

The main purpose of Nike's "Hero" print advertising campaign was to create an image which appealed to a particular segment of the company's market—women—so that women would identify with this company, and thus purchase Nike products. Olins (1989) says that a company's "image" is the totality of all the impressions that it makes on all of its audience; however, this image varies widely between different audiences. In seeking to create a favorable impression with multiple and diverse target audiences of women, I argue that Nike strategically incorporated conflicting messages into the "Hero" campaign that both promoted and constrained feminist values; depending on their subject positions, audience members read varied meanings into the text, and therefore identified with Nike and its products based on those differing interpretations.

In order to understand how this process of identification takes place, it is essential to first define what it is. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) define identification as, "the dynamic social process by which identities are constructed, through which they guide us,

and by which they order our world” (p. 306). Identification represents the developing, maintaining, and changing of alliances between a person and various groups, bodies, or properties, such as gender, friends, values, beliefs, family, activities, nation, church, profession, ethnicity, or various combinations of these properties. Identity is comprised of “core beliefs or assumptions, values, attitudes, preferences, decisional premises, gestures, habits, rules, and so on” (Scott, Corman and Cheney, 1998, p. 303). One’s identity provides her with norms and ideals that tell her who she is, what she values, and how she should behave. As one develops and matures, allies herself with different social memberships, and undergoes a variety of life experiences and transitions, her identity may change somewhat. Thus, one’s identity is never in a completely permanent or “fixed” state.

According to Burke (1973; 1950), as one identifies herself with various groups, people, or organizations, she shares substance with those with whom she associates. Two entities, which are united through common attitudes, ideas, values, beliefs, or other properties, are consubstantial. Thus, “consubstantiality” becomes synonymous with “identification,” which ultimately results in persuasion. Burke (1950) states:

Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a [wo]man only insofar as you can talk his [her] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his [hers] (p. 55).

Burke (1973) discusses three basic ways in which identification functions. First, there is the use of identification as a means to establish rapport with an audience through an emphasis on shared sympathies or experiences. An example of this could be two

passengers on an airplane who are seated next to each other, who discover through their conversation that they both share a love for fly fishing. This type of identification is most often used in advertising as an appeal to values, basic human needs, and experiences which the audience is likely to share, such as individuality, popularity, patriotism, family, love, sex, freedom, or power. In this paper, I argue that the tensions involved with being a woman and an athlete in American society were highlighted in the “Hero” advertising campaign as a way to create consubstantiality with some readers in the audience; however, more traditional images of femininity were also incorporated into the ads by the rhetor in an effort to appeal to women in the audience who were less concerned with athletics or feminist issues. Women in the audience saw and responded to different parts of the “Hero” ads, and consequently Nike’s products enjoyed success among multiple audiences of women, albeit for very different reasons.

While analysts who apply the concept of identification frequently focus on this type of rapport, Burke states that there are two additional types of identification that are often overlooked, yet equally as important. Identification by antithesis occurs when “identification is created among opposing entities on the basis of a common enemy” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p. 175). In other words, this describes a union between two forces by an opposition that is held in common. Burke uses the example of a candidate for public office to describe this rhetorical device (1973, p. 267). While a political candidate may find it difficult to tell voters how she might enforce policies that she *supports*, she can use antithesis to recommend her position by stating the policies that she *opposes*. It is essential to note that an antithetical focus on an opposing force, or “scapegoat,” serves an important purpose: it allows for the deflection of attention away

from potential problems or inconsistencies within one's own camp. Political advertisements, for instance, often use an antithetical focus directed toward the opposing candidate for this very purpose.

The third kind of identification as discussed by Burke could be called identification by inaccuracy. This occurs when one falsely assumes something or someone else's power as her own. An example of this is the human tendency to mistake technological or mechanical powers for our own, such as the sense of power one feels while driving fast in a car (Burke, 1973). While riding a bicycle, one increases speed by pedaling faster, thus working harder; when driving a car, however, one travels faster by simply pressing her foot on the car's accelerator, *not* through any effort or work of her own. This identification between human and machine inaccurately enables the driver to think more highly of herself because of "power" that is not produced by (and therefore does not actually belong to) her. Advertisers play with this form of identification in order to persuade the consumer that the purchase of a particular truck, deodorant, stereo, cigarette, dishwashing detergent, or article of clothing will "empower" him.

In order to comprehend the motives behind rhetoric and identification, one must understand the notion of division. Because we as human beings exist in physically separate bodies, we are divided and therefore isolated from one another (Foss, Foss and Trapp, 1991). Although we are physically divided, we are yet joined with one another through the substance that we share. Ironically, identification occurs as a result of difference and separation. The basic motive for rhetoric is rooted in the concept of division; that is, "Only because of their separateness do individuals communicate with one another and try to resolve their differences" (Foss, Foss and Trapp, 1991, p. 175).

Identification encourages those who may see themselves as “different” to focus on their commonalities and shared experiences with others, rather than their distinctions. Consequently, identification is an integral and essential component in the process of consciousness raising.

It is useful to examine Nike’s “Hero” print advertising campaign through this lens, in order to discover how these ads attempted to appeal to different audiences of women with various backgrounds, experiences with oppression, athletic abilities, and feminist values. In my analysis, I argue that Nike incorporated messages of both traditional femininity and feminism into the “Hero” ads in order to invite identification between itself as a company and multiple audiences of women; I also discuss the ways in which the ads function for these specific audiences, given their different subject positions, and I argue that for some audiences, the “Hero” ads function as a device of consciousness raising. Although Nike’s purpose for creating this advertising campaign was to sell a product, it is essential to note that the “Hero” ads also functioned to define, shape, and create particular ways of thinking about women athletes during an important turning point in the history of women in sports; these messages continue to have important implications for our attitudes about women athletes in America today.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS

The personal is still political. The millennial feminist has to be aware that oppression exerts itself in and through her most intimate relationships, beginning with the most intimate, her relationship with her body.

(Greer, as cited in Redfern, 2001, p. 1)

Media's Interest in Containing Feminism

Mass media in the United States has historically had a vested interest in preventing feminism from flourishing (Wood, 2001; Thornham, 2000; Bordo, 1997; Dow, 1996; Douglas, 1994; Wolf, 1991). Feminist scholars argue that media is a business that has capitalized on the unpaid labor of women. One issue such scholars discuss is the fact that feminist demands, such as equal pay for equal work, flexible work schedules, and child care, can be costly for employers; therefore, media as an institution stands to lose a great deal as feminism continues to permeate American culture. Critics assert that by using media images to promote traditional gendered roles for women and men, media organizations can resist having to change their own institutional structures in order to accommodate women's issues in the workplace (Dow, 1996; Douglas, 1994).

It is also important to note that media has profited tremendously by selling representations of traditional femininity to women (Bordo, 1997; Dow, 1996; Douglas, 1994; Wolf, 1991). Feminist scholars argue that women as housewives and caretakers have been primary consumer targets for media, particularly advertising; thus, representations of women's role in the home have traditionally been highlighted in advertising (Thornham, 2000; Dow, 1996; Douglas, 1994). Advertisers have worked to

persuade women that their role as a consumer is directly linked to their effectiveness as wives and mothers. To this end, Susan Douglas (1994) notes,

America's consumer culture was predicated on the notion that women were the major consumers of most goods—that was their job, after all—and that, to sell to them, you had to emphasize their role as wives and mothers...To sell to them, advertisers...stressed how many more products they needed, and how many more tasks they needed to undertake with those products, to be genuinely good wives and moms (p. 56).

This is an interesting point, given that many women needed jobs in order to earn the money to pay for products, but were not typically portrayed as working women. By ignoring this fact, and by keeping the focus on traditional social roles for women, advertising has functioned to contain feminism in order to support its own institutional interests.

In addition, advertising has been criticized by feminist scholars for its promotion of unattainable standards of beauty and unhealthy body images for women (Wood, 2001, 1997; Kilbourne, 2000, 1987; Cortese, 1999; Bordo, 1997; Twitchell, 1995; Wolf, 1991). Notes Wood (2001), "Media pathologize the bodies of men and especially of women, prompting us to consider normal physical qualities and functions as abnormal and requiring corrective measures" (p. 298). Corporations have profited enormously by marketing various products to consumers with promises of rectifying their flaws; therefore, there has been little incentive for advertisers to change their methods (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Douglas, 1994).

The Creation of a “Feminist Consumer”

As feminism and women’s sports have taken hold in our culture, advertisers have recognized an opportunity to expand their business, and have begun to focus their efforts on the segment of women who are concerned with these issues (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Singley, 2002; Buss, 2000). Knowing that traditional images of femininity may not appeal to this particular audience, advertisers have struggled to find feminist representations of women that could attract the type of consumer they desired. Consequently, in an effort to both appeal to and create a “feminist consumer,” advertisers have begun to incorporate feminist messages into their rhetoric (Shugart, Waggoner and Hallstein, 2001; Dow, 1996).

Some feminist theorists contend that the appearance of feminist themes in mainstream media is notable, but that ultimately the appropriation of feminist concerns by the media and advertising is troubling (Hogeland, 2001; Shugart, Waggoner and Hallstein, 2001; Thornham, 2000; Orr, 1997; Dow, 1996). Shugart, Waggoner and Hallstein (2001) argue that the incorporation of feminist themes into advertising could be seen as problematic, as it has caused these ideals to be,

coopted, commodified, sold to audiences as a ‘genuine imitation’—
something whose code appears strikingly similar to the resistant
discourse but, by virtue of strategic repositioning, is rendered devoid
of challenge (p. 198).

These critics argue that the brand of feminism promoted by advertisers, dubbed “consumer feminism,” is essentially an oxymoron, and that advertisers are simply repackaging their traditional message: women are not acceptable in their natural state

(Wood, 2001). Drawing upon a general cultural tendency to shift the focus from feminist politics to feminist identity, consumer feminism reduces structural issues into individual problems, and promotes personal choice and buying power as the preferred means for political action (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Hogeland, 2001; Dow, 1996). These authors argue that because consumption itself is a source of women's oppression, the ability of advertising to promote genuine feminist concerns is necessarily limited by its purpose: to create a void in the consumer, and to persuade the consumer that her shortcomings can be easily corrected by purchasing products. Thus, coopted versions of feminism are repackaged, commodified, and mass marketed to a mainstream audience by advertisers, which increases the possibility that these values may be interpreted as "progress." As a result, representations of feminism in the media function hegemonically in more subtle, and therefore more powerful, ways (Hogeland, 2001; Shugart, 2003, 2001; Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein, 2001).

The appropriation of feminist themes by advertisers results in a variety of constraints on the message and on feminism itself; several of these tensions are present in Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women, and will be explored in this analysis. I will examine these conflicting messages by focusing on a variety of feminist themes throughout the "Hero" ads. I will then discuss the significance of these multiple messages as they were interpreted by a variety of target audiences.

Polysemy, Strategic Ambiguity and the Multiple Target Audiences of "Hero"

In her 1998 essay entitled, "Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism," Leah Ceccarelli defines the critical concept of polysemy as, "the existence of determinate but nonsingular denotational meanings" (p. 399). She notes that it is

important for critics to attend to the polysemy of a text in order to consider the possibilities for alternative readings by different audiences, depending on their subject positions. This is a significant point, as the focus on polysemy assumes that multiple interpretations of a text add to the audience's power over the message, and therefore lessen the hegemonic control of the rhetor. In Ceccarelli's essay, three different forms of polysemy are described: resistive reading, strategic ambiguity, and hermeneutic depth (Ceccarelli, 1998); I will briefly describe each of these forms, and then discuss the implications of polysemy with regard to the Nike "Hero" advertising campaign.

The "resistive reading" form of polysemy assumes that audiences have a limited, yet powerful, ability to challenge the dominant social, economic, or political meanings that are inscribed into a message (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 399). By developing a resistive understanding of a particular text's meaning, subordinate audiences are able to enhance their own power by lessening the control of the rhetor over the intended meaning of the message.

The second form of polysemy discussed in this essay is that of "strategic ambiguity" (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 404). Unlike resistive readings, this type of polysemy is planned by the rhetor, and incorporates varied meanings into a text in order to appeal to multiple audiences, resulting in two or more otherwise conflicting audiences being united in their appreciation of a text, albeit for entirely different reasons. By intentionally inserting multiple meanings into a text, the rhetor ultimately maintains control of the text's significance and reaps the benefits of the polysemic interpretation.

Finally, Ceccarelli discusses the polysemy of "hermeneutic depth" (1998, p. 407). Critics who recognize the hermeneutic depth of a text argue that its multiplicity of

meanings must be accepted by the audience in order to fully grasp the text's significance. In so doing, critics encourage audiences to recognize the complexities in works that have previously been categorized in a more singular fashion.

Ceccarelli's discussion of the second form of polysemy, strategic ambiguity, is particularly relevant to this analysis of Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign. I argue that there are several possible audiences for this message, and that these audiences vary along a continuum of sorts, and include the following broad categories: staunch feminists who reject the appropriation of feminism; feminists who are informed about the issues and themes described in the ads; women such as the previously discussed "Title IX Babies," who have experienced the situations described by the ads, but who do not necessarily define themselves as feminists; and women who are more closely aligned with traditional concepts of femininity, and who are relatively unaware of feminism.

Nike Promotes Feminism Through "Hero's" Message

In Chapters One and Two, I described several issues, contradictions, and common experiences faced by many female athletes in the United States. Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign focused on several of these themes, among them: body image and unrealistic standards of beauty; fear of being "too much;" pressure on female athletes to be as feminine as they are competitive; traditional definitions of femininity; and traditional social norms that expect women to be passive and weak. Building on these issues, which were likely to be shared by segments of the audience, Nike prompted certain readers in the audience to participate in each ad by encouraging her to reflect on the ways in which these cultural tensions played out in her own experience, and inviting the reader to identify with the commonality of the situations described in the ads. By

promoting bodily experience through physical activity as a means through which to gain knowledge about herself, by asking open-ended questions in order to prompt the reader to engage in a process of self-reflection, and by inviting her to identify with other readers in the audience through the strategic use of image and language, “Hero’s” message had the potential to lead certain readers to examine the inherent contradictions that are a part of what it means to be a female, and a female athlete, in American society. I argue that for some audience members who participated in these processes, “Hero’s” message functioned rhetorically to promote the radical feminist technique of consciousness raising, through which important, although limited, feminist insight could be gained. I acknowledge that this argument is limited by the complexity of the messages promoted by the ads, as well as the variety of women in the audience. That said, I assert that the potential for consciousness raising to occur through advertising is notable and therefore worth exploring, as it carries with it important implications for the power of advertising, as a form of rhetoric, to effect social change.

As I explore and illustrate this argument, I will focus my analysis on the following themes and cultural tensions: body image and traditional definitions of feminine beauty; a fear of being too much; athletic women’s struggle to balance the image of “tough competitor” versus “feminine woman;” and a more inclusive definition of the concept of “hero.” I will first illustrate the feminist messages present in the “Hero” campaign, and I will then compare image to text in order to explore the messages of traditional femininity that are also infused into these ads, and I will discuss the ways in which feminism is constrained as a result. Finally, I will discuss the possibility of

multiple responses to the “Hero” ads by the multiple audiences of women who viewed them, as well as the implications of those varied interpretations.

Body Image and Traditional Definitions of Feminine Beauty

One of the common themes of both second- and third wave feminist agendas is that of body image and the resistance to traditional ideals of feminine beauty. Nike addressed this issue repeatedly throughout the “Hero” campaign in both image and text. The ads encouraged women to measure body image, beauty, and definitions of femininity by their own standards, rather than by comparing themselves to the outdated and unrealistic ideals prescribed by patriarchal society. Collectively, the images of the “Hero” campaign portrayed able-bodied women and girls, of a variety of skin tones, ages, and races, who appeared to be very active, healthy, and wholesome. These images corresponded with and reinforced the textual message of the campaign, which promoted acceptance of a multiplicity of images of beauty and femininity.

Appendix D provides an excellent example of the manner in which Nike incorporated the issue of body image into the “Hero” campaign. The text of this ad asks the reader, “Have you ever seen anyone in a magazine who seemed even vaguely like you looking back? (If you have, turn the page.)” In this ad, Nike reflects and plays on the assumption that the reader has previously flipped through a magazine and experienced the frustration of feeling as though she is not represented by the unrealistic images of women who are depicted in the ads, as well as feeling inadequate by comparison.

The images in this ad are very complex and rich, and support the textual message. A large, color image depicts a seemingly relaxed, carefree, and natural little girl, who appears to be comfortably seated on a no-frills, bare mattress as she dries her short brown

hair and pays no attention to the camera. This photo is juxtaposed against a smaller, black and white image of a young woman who is an easily recognizable example of a stereotypical magazine model: she has blonde hair, defined cheekbones, and a pouty expression on her face; she is extremely thin; she is wearing tons of makeup, a tight, see-through black dress, and spiked, sling-back heels; and she is kneeling in a very awkward and unnatural, posed position.

By beginning with a general, open-ended question, Nike invites the reader into the ad and encourages her to reflect on the extent to which her own ideals of attractiveness are influenced by society's standards. As the text of the ad continues, the reader is challenged to resist these unrealistic images by choosing to establish her own standards for her body and physical appearance: "Whatever standards you set for yourself, for how much you want to weigh, for how hard you work out, for how many times you make it to the gym, should be your standards. Not someone else's." When contrasting the images of the model and the little girl with one another, and examining them in combination with the text, it becomes clear that the image of the young girl in the ad embodies the challenge posed to the reader by the message. She appears to hold little regard for social norms and standards of beauty, as demonstrated by no shirt, short hair, chipped toenail polish, and lack of interest in the camera that is taking her picture. Consistent with a third wave focus on individuality, the message urges the reader to consider personal choice as a means of resistance.

Appendix J provides another example of an ad in the "Hero" campaign that promotes consciousness raising by addressing the theme of body image. The copy of this ad begins by posing a series of questions: "When do we start so desperately wanting to be

someone else? When do those first doubts about ourselves creep in? Why do we let them?...Why do they make us want to change ourselves?" While asking these questions of the reader as an individual, the ad uses the words "we" and "us" to signify that the experience of comparing oneself with other women is both common and shared. This strategy encourages the reader to participate in the meaning of the ad, and for those readers who can identify with the experience described in the text, the ad works to create a sense that the reader is not alone.

As the message continues, the text encourages the reader to use her body as a physical site of resistance against the cultural norms of beauty and femininity that cause her to doubt herself. The text claims that comparing ourselves to other women by standards such as "cuter, more fit, somehow more womanly..." is problematic, because it ultimately causes self-doubt and impedes our ability to accept ourselves as we are. The ad asserts that one possible way for a woman to resist the beauty standards that are imposed on her by both society and herself is to learn how to accept her body through exercise. The message states that the process of engaging in physical activity is one means through which energy, self-assurance, pride in self, and feeling beautiful can be achieved. The ad suggests that gaining physical strength and knowledge of herself through exercise transfers into other areas of her life, and enables a woman to accept herself and to feel more confident about who she is, rather than worrying about who she is not. Consistent with the theory of body feminism, this ad urges women to use their bodies as a place to begin the process of understanding themselves and their world.

Historically, "feminine" and "beautiful" women have been defined as passive, attractive objects that exists for the enjoyment and pleasure of others, and namely, men.

Building on this assumption, Appendix H inquires, “Is it possible we’re more beautiful in motion than we are standing still? Is it possible we’re now more admired for what we can do, rather than how we look?” Traditional definitions of beauty are referenced in the text with the phrases, “standing still” and “how we look.” However, Nike contrasts these passive terms with strong phrases that vividly describe a new definition of beauty: “in motion;” “more admired for what we can do;” “strength, passion, and skill;” “power;” “keep moving;” and “lasting image.” The message suggests that action, and not simply exercise, is the means through which a stronger, more powerful, and confident sense of beauty can be achieved.

The image in the ad depicts a woman walking away from the camera, and the camera is shooting up, causing her to look tall and powerful. The woman appears to be walking briskly and the photo of her is blurry, which further illustrates the fact that she is “in motion,” as the text suggests. She is pumping her arms, wearing running shorts, running shoes, an athletic warm-up jacket, and her hair is in a ponytail. Because the woman’s back is to the camera her face is obscured, and the reader is unable to discern whether or not her face is stereotypically beautiful. The image reinforces the copy of the message in many ways. The model is captured in action, which serves to illustrate the emphasis on “motion” in the text. The fact that we can’t see the woman’s face is also significant, as the reader is more easily able to identify with her and with the ad. The fact that she is in motion is reinforced as the most important thing, rather than her level of attractiveness.

Throughout the “Hero” campaign, Nike proposes the bodily experience of movement and exercise as a possible means through which women might learn about

themselves and ultimately, come to accept their own bodies. Appendix J prompts the reader to “Think about how good you can feel...after a workout. It’s not just the physical results, it’s the energy you create that makes you feel self-assured, proud of yourself, more beautiful.” Appendix H provides another example, as it urges women to “Recognize the power in each walk. Because the more we keep moving, the more we leave in our wake a lasting image of what’s beautiful.”

As discussed in Chapter Two, I do not suggest that physical activity alone is a viable solution for transforming the order of patriarchal oppression. However, I do assert that the physical act of learning to take up one’s space by moving one’s body through sport and exercise can serve as a powerful “starting point” for some women in the audience, as they engage in the process of developing awareness and making sense of the realities of their lives. I argue that the examples discussed serve as positive illustrations of the theory of body feminism, although I also recognize that the feminist insights gained in this instance are limited to the realm of athletics. That said, as the process of consciousness raising begins with issues of oppression in sports, the potential exists for this awareness to carry over into an increasing awareness of other structural inequalities, as well.

A Fear of Being Too Much

In Chapter Two, I discussed the “fear of being too much,” a powerful and commonly understood, yet rarely expressed, constraint on the actions, behaviors, and beliefs of many American women. I also described the ways in which women in sports are affected by this constant tension. By referencing and illustrating this theme repeatedly in the “Hero” campaign, Nike brings to light the widely held, traditional

notion that women should be passive, weak, and not draw attention to themselves. In so doing, the overall message of the campaign enables some readers in the audience to develop an awareness that they are not alone in feeling limited by these rules; as they choose to engage with the ads in the campaign, this audience is encouraged to consider the broader context in which such social norms are situated.

As noted above, the first ad in the “Hero” campaign, is shown to be the cover of the “scrapbook” in which all of the ads are contained (Appendix A). As such, the text in this ad is particularly relevant, as it serves to introduce to the reader several of the recurring themes that will be present in the campaign. The copy of the first ad reads:

Will she look at magazines and think she has to be as thin as the models
she sees? Think that independence makes her less desirable? Lower
her expectations because she can’t find women to look up to?

The image of the ad portrays the upper body of a young girl, and she is dressed in a baseball uniform and holding a mitt. She is looking directly into the camera, with a rather serious expression on her face.

The series of three questions in this opening ad is significant, as it serves to invite the reader to participate in the process of working through the recurring themes of body image, independence, and the importance of role models that appear throughout the rest of the campaign. The question, “Will she...think that independence makes her less desirable?” is built upon a traditional stereotype of a woman as someone who depends on others, who needs others in order to survive, and who cannot make it alone. Moreover, this question illuminates an underlying, opposing assumption that women who attempt to

assert themselves and who are self-reliant are not considered as feminine, or attractive, to others.

When examined in relationship to one another, three phrases in the text, “thin,” “less desirable,” and “lower her expectations,” combine to illustrate the characteristics of the “fear of being too much.” That is, women are socialized from a very early age to be small, to not take up space, to be quiet, to be content with what they are given and to not impose demands on others. In essence, these questions invite the reader to consider the ways in which this fear has impacted her own choices and behaviors from a very early age. By asking the reader to supply the answers to these questions from her own personal experiences with oppression, the ad offers the reader the option of participating with the ad as her subject position allows; for those women in the audience who are able to relate with the experiences described and who choose to engage with the ad, the potential for gaining some feminist insight through the process of consciousness raising exists.

Appendix F provides another important example of the manner in which “Hero” builds upon the “fear of being too much,” and in so doing, invites the readers for whom these issues are relevant to reflect on personal experiences with oppression in athletics, particularly within the context of the weight room. The copy in this ad asks the reader,

If we encourage muscles these days, why are too many muscles manly?
...Isn't it possible for femininity and physical power to coexist? Isn't
it possible that the more we embrace our bodies, the more womanly we
become?

The image in the ad shows a stack of weights, which are a part of a Nautilus-type weightlifting machine. The top four weights (the lightest) read, “TONED” in place of the

numbers that would normally tell how much weight the person is lifting; the bottom five weights in the picture read, “MANLY.” The pin is positioned in the third weight, and though we are not able to see the person who is exercising on the machine, we can presume that a woman is lifting the weights.

Text and image converge in this particular ad to produce a very powerful and effective message. This ad plays on the conventional wisdom that has long dictated women’s methods of physical training. Traditional ideals of femininity maintain that women’s bodies should be fit and toned but not “bulky;” therefore, to achieve this body type, women are instructed to “lift light weights, with a high number of reps.” Women are also warned against lifting heavy weights, as traditional standards of femininity do not include women with large muscles. Those women who decide to resist this standard in favor of training their bodies and developing their muscles are often branded as “manly.”

The expectation that women’s bodies must be fit and muscles toned, but not “too muscular,” not “too much,” creates a double bind that is almost impossible for women to negotiate successfully. In Chapter One, I discussed the tension that underlies this double bind: that when women learn what it means to fully occupy their physical space, it becomes easier for women to understand how to claim their emotional and social space, as well. By asking a series of questions, this message has the potential to engage the more athletic readers in the audience, and challenges them to reflect on the ways in which women are limited physically, and I would argue emotionally and socially, by conventional norms of femininity. The text encourages this particular audience of

women to resist outdated ideals by incorporating physical strength, power, and self-acceptance into a new definition of what it means to be feminine and “womanly.”

Each ad in the Nike “Hero” campaign suggests to the athletic readers in the audience that their bodies are an important and powerful source of self-understanding. The campaign as a whole encourages the athletic reader to learn how to let her body take the lead as a source of knowledge and understanding. In other words, the overall message of the campaign urges this particular audience to use their bodily experiences of learning to take up physical space on the playing field as a source for coming to know and understand what it means to take up emotional, social, and psychological space in society, as well. While not all readers in this particular audience will engage with the feminist messages in the ads, some will, and through this process may develop a greater awareness of feminist issues and concerns within the realm of sports.

“Tough Competitor” versus “Feminine Woman”

In the second chapter, I discussed the tension that female athletes constantly face of balancing their image as a “tough competitor” versus that of a “feminine woman.” Additionally, in Chapter One I discussed the past efforts by second wave feminists within the arena of athletics to reject the idea that participation in sports is “masculine,” and to promote a more inclusive ideal of the concept of “femininity.” An examination of the text and image of Appendix E reveals that Nike has responded to this tension of “competitive versus feminine athlete” by incorporating these very issues into their strategies in this advertisement.

The message of this ad celebrates a professional basketball player, and promotes her as an example of strength for women. Cynthia Cooper is an African American athlete

who has been recognized by the Women's National Basketball Association for her leadership, both on and off of the basketball court. The text of the ad begins by asking the reader to consider, "How do you know you're a hero?" and then details a laundry list of Cooper's accomplishments; listed among these achievements are her participation on two championship teams, two Most Valuable Player awards, and two successful basketball seasons. After describing many of Cooper's successes, Nike defines Cooper as a hero, and someone whom others who share similar values can respect and attempt to emulate.

The large image in the ad portrays Cynthia Cooper in an active role. She appears to be in the middle of a basketball game: she is in uniform; she is sweaty; there is a crowd in the background; she is high-fiving another player and smiling. This image is juxtaposed against a smaller image on the opposite page, which depicts a young, African-American girl, looking directly and expressionlessly at the camera and standing still, holding a basketball under one arm and wearing basketball jersey with Cooper's number (14) and team (Comets) written on the front. The angle of the camera is shooting down on her, and she is looking up; this reinforces the textual message of Cooper being a woman to "look up to."

Comparing image to text in this ad illustrates the notion that neither competition in athletics nor the definition of a "hero" must be based upon a stereotypically masculine model. That is, being a fierce competitor does not masculinize a woman, nor does it preclude other characteristics of an athlete's personality, such as being an affirming teammate; conversely, being affirming and supportive in the midst of athletic competition

should not be considered a feminine trait, but simply a characteristic of a “good sport,” whether enacted by women or men.

By listing Cooper’s athletic achievements in the text, describing her as a hero, and providing an image of a young girl who is looking up to Cooper, Nike seems to suggest that the quality of being an accomplished and competitive athlete can be incorporated into a woman’s sense of her own femininity. In addition, through the image of Cooper smiling and congratulating a teammate while sweaty, wearing her uniform, and presumably in the midst of a basketball game, one could interpret the message to suggest that the stereotypically masculine traits of physical strength and competition and the traditionally feminine traits of nurturance and affirmation are not mutually exclusive for either women or men.

A New Model of Heroism

In Chapter One, I discussed the traditional definition of a “hero” and asserted that one of the central themes of this advertising campaign is that of claiming and redefining the “hero” ideal within a more inclusive, feminine context. The text of Appendix C begins by prompting the reader to consider, “Does a hero know she’s a hero if no one tells her?” The message then continues to engage the reader by suggesting a series of characteristics to describe a hero:

A hero doesn’t have to save a busload of school kids from certain disaster. Or score the winning point in a big game. A hero can be anyone who inspires you, anyone you look up to, anyone who cheers you on, makes you better than you were before—just as they made themselves better than they were before.

It is interesting to note that the text of this message is shown opposite a large image of a dark-skinned, shorthaired woman who is holding a baby up to her shoulder. The image and descriptions provided by this ad do not necessarily fit with the more traditional, masculine definition of a hero, and promote a more inclusive conception of this ideal.

The text of Appendix B invites the reader to consider, “Who are your heroes? Did you name an actor? Did you name an athlete? Did you name a woman? (*Did you name any women?*) Why don’t we think of women as heroes?” Along similar lines, Appendix E begins by asking the reader to consider, “How do you know you’re a hero?”

Nike seems to suggest throughout the campaign that their definition of a hero is based upon an ideal for women that incorporates both stereotypically feminine and masculine traits, such as being nurturing, self-accepting, affirming, powerful, confident, assertive, competitive, and accomplished; this serves to illustrate the concept of strategic ambiguity on the part of the rhetor. However, the message also urges the reader to think about her own experiences and role models as she thinks about the qualities, traits, and people she would consider to be the embodiment of a “hero,” and to define this ideal for herself. By asking the reader to engage in these questions, the message promotes the development of personal awareness for some readers.

Nike Promotes Traditional Femininity Through “Hero’s” Message

I have argued that feminist consumers and female athletes were important target audiences for the “Hero” ads, and I have asserted that in order to appeal to these audiences, Nike incorporated feminist messages into its rhetoric. However, it is important to consider that the “Hero” advertising campaign for women occurred within a complex and often contradictory cultural milieu; although feminism and women’s sports

were becoming more established in American culture, the traditional, patriarchal ideologies of sexism were still prevalent. Thus, women who were relatively unaware of feminist issues were a significant audience for Nike to consider, as well. I argue that while Nike's message promoted feminist themes in an effort to appeal to feminist and athletic audiences, the rhetor simultaneously infused traditional messages of femininity into the "Hero" campaign in order to create identification with more mainstream readers. In order to illustrate this point, I again focus on several of the themes and tensions discussed in Chapters One and Two as a framework for discussion, and I examine the relationship of image to text in the "Hero" ads in order to uncover the more subtle representations of traditional femininity that are promoted by the ads. I explore the manner in which these mainstream messages served to appeal to less feminist audiences, and I discuss the possible implications for this response.

Body Image and Traditional Definitions of Feminine Beauty

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the issue of body image and traditional images of beauty and femininity, and used Appendix D as an example to illustrate "Hero's" urging of the readers to establish their own standards for beauty and body image. The text of the message tells the reader,

Most magazines are made to sell us a fantasy of what we're supposed to be. They reflect what society deems to be a standard, however unrealistic or unattainable that standard is...you need to remember that it's just ink on paper.

The text offers a fairly strong criticism of the stereotypical images of beauty promoted within the pages of magazines. The text ends with the assertion, “Whatever standards you set for yourself...should be your standards. Not someone else’s.”

However, it is interesting to note that Nike has chosen a child rather than a grown woman to illustrate an alternative to the traditional beauty ideal. I acknowledge the fact that young children are typically not aware enough of social norms to feel constricted by them, and that grown women could certainly learn much from this example. That said, it seems curious that Nike has chosen to use a young girl, rather than an adult woman, to embody the strong ideals promoted by the message’s text. An image of a woman who fully embraces and embodies the assertions in this message may be considered “too much” by some readers, causing the average reader to have difficulty in identifying with this image, and therefore with the message. By comparison, the image of a young girl would be considered more conventionally attractive and appealing, and less threatening to a mainstream audience. This choice on the part of the rhetor serves to promote a traditional view of femininity in a very subtle way, thus appealing to more conservative audiences without necessarily being recognized or resisted by audiences with more feminist views.

Appendix J provides another example of the rhetor’s promotion of mainstream femininity through the strategic use of imagery. Again, the text of this ad encourages a positive ideal for women with regard to body image and beauty. The copy of the ad asks a series of questions, which invite the reader to consider her own experiences of self-doubt, comparison, and inferiority. The text then asserts that one means by which to become stronger and more confident in herself is through the experience of exercising

and training her body: “It’s not just the physical results, it’s the energy you create that makes you feel self-assured, proud of yourself, more beautiful. And that can make us happy to be EXACTLY WHO WE ARE.”

Comparing image to text reveals powerful constraints on the feminist message that is promoted by this ad. The ad shows a young girl who is playing dress-up. The outfit worn by the girl serves as an illustration of very traditional norms of femininity: she is wearing a pink ballerina costume; there is an ivory wedding veil-type headpiece on the dresser in front of her; she appears to have applied some form of lip balm or lipstick to her lips, and is puckering her lips while looking in an ornate silver mirror; her hair is long and is drawn into a bun at the back of her head. The opposite page shows two smaller images of a dark-haired Barbie-type doll that is wearing a tiara and evening gown, holding flowers, and waving to a crowd as if she’s won a pageant. This image represents two stereotypical beauty ideals for women: Barbie and a beauty queen.

While the text suggests that emulating others rather than accepting ourselves leads to self-doubt, the ad portrays a young girl playing dress-up, the very practice of which is based upon a premise that one is pretending to be someone or something she is not. The image normalizes this practice by making it seem cute. Moreover, the comparison of this photo with still photos of the Barbie-esque beauty queen on the opposing page actually seems to promote the image of the doll as the ideal. There are no images in this ad to illustrate confident, self-assured, grown women who are engaging in physical activity, which is the action that the ad promotes as an avenue to self-acceptance. While the text of the ad promotes feminist ideals, the image does not reinforce this message, and in fact promotes traditional definitions of femininity in a subtle and sophisticated manner.

A New Model of Heroism

In Chapter One and in the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Nike's encouragement of the reader to claim the definition of "hero" for herself, and to redefine this definition in ways that are inclusive of both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities and characteristics. However, even as Nike promotes a new definition of the concept of a "hero" throughout the text of this campaign, it constrains this ideal by juxtaposing the feminist rhetoric with images that offer an alternative, more conservative interpretation of this message.

"Why don't we think of women as heroes?" asks Appendix B. The text goes on to recommend that the reader, "Look around. We are surrounded by strong, courageous, accomplished women." The image in this message depicts a young girl, dressed in a sundress and sport sandals, who is standing still, looking directly at the camera, and smiling.

The use of a young girl as an illustration of this message is strategic on the part of the rhetor. It is important to note that children in our culture are often viewed as being weaker and more innocent, defenseless, and dependent than adults. While the copy of this ad specifically describes a hero as a woman who is "strong, courageous, accomplished," a child is pictured as the illustration of this ideal. I have previously argued in this chapter that Nike promotes a more inclusive definition of a "hero" through this campaign; consequently, one interpretive possibility for this strategy might be that the rhetor is attempting to promote incorporating children into this definition. However, I assert that it is more likely that this image was chosen as the embodiment of the text in order to soften the feminist message, and therefore render it less radical. By offering a

less radical image of a female hero, Nike makes this concept more palatable for women in the audience who are less inclined to identify with feminism.

Earlier in this chapter, I posited that Appendix C serves as a positive example of Nike's promotion of the inclusive model of a "hero;" I argued that the image of a motherly figure in this ad, along with the textual descriptors, "anyone who inspires you, anyone you look up to, anyone who cheers you on, makes you better than you were before..." served to embody a more complete definition of this ideal.

I assert that this image may also appeal to less feminist audiences of women. Nike has broadened its definition of a "hero" by incorporating an illustration of more traditionally feminine characteristics, such as nurturer, comforter, and supporter. By choosing an image of a mother to embody traits that have historically been viewed as feminine, the rhetor plays to stereotypical notions of the types of women who possess these characteristics. Consequently, this ad has the potential to create identification with more mainstream readers in the audience.

Multiple Implications For Multiple Audiences

A polysemic reading of the "Hero" campaign reveals that Nike purposefully invited multiple readings of these ads by incorporating messages of both feminism and traditional femininity, thereby promoting varied readings and responses by different members of the audience. By so doing, Nike was able to connect with a wide range of readers in order to accomplish its main goal, which was to expand its business into the realm of women's athletics and to sell products. However, I argue that in the process, "Hero's" message had the potential to significantly impact some audiences of women beyond the simple act of selling products.

Earlier in this chapter, I noted several possible audiences for the Nike “Hero” advertising campaign: strong feminists who reject the appropriation of feminism; feminists who are already informed about the issues discussed in the ads; athletic women such as the previously discussed “Title IX Babies,” who have experienced the situations described by the ads, but who do not necessarily designate themselves as feminists; and mainstream readers who are relatively unaware of feminism. I argue that as a result of their varied subject positions, these different audiences noticed and responded to these ads in various ways; consequently, Nike’s “Hero” ads functioned to both promote and constrain feminism for different audiences of women. I will briefly discuss the ways in which the three possible audiences of staunch feminists, already-informed feminists, and mainstream readers may have interpreted and responded to “Hero’s” message. I will focus on one target audience, athletic women, to discuss the potential for feminist consciousness raising to occur through engagement with the ads.

The “Staunch Feminist” Reader

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, many feminists argue that consumerism is a source of oppression for women, and therefore claim that the concept of the “consumer feminist” is an oxymoron (Wood, 2001; Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Hogeland, 2001; Dow, 1996). In addition, I discussed the criticism by many feminist scholars of advertising’s appropriation of feminist themes (Hogeland, 2001; Shugart, Waggoner and Hallstein, 2001; Thornham, 2000; Orr, 1997; Dow, 1996). These scholars argue that mainstream representations of feminism are problematic, because they offer a veneer of feminism that is overly simplified and inaccurate. Thus, it can be concluded that such readers of the “Hero” advertising campaign would not have engaged the ads positively,

rejecting both the feminist message and the appropriation of feminist themes by the rhetor. I assert that this audience would have felt constrained by “Hero’s” limited representation of feminism, and given the subject position and feminist stance of these readers, I infer that this audience probably would have discounted the ads altogether.

The “Already-Informed Feminist” Reader

Another potential audience for the “Hero” campaign was comprised of readers who identified themselves as feminists, and who were already well-informed about the feminist themes addressed in these ads. Because of her previous involvement and awareness of such issues as body image (Appendices D and F), traditional definitions of beauty standards (Appendices H and J), and the “fear of being too much” (Appendix F), it can be assumed that this reader probably rejected the messages of traditional femininity promoted by “Hero,” but did not gain tremendous feminist insight into previously unknown oppressions by reading the ads. However, it can be inferred that she may have felt a sense of identification with the feminist messages discussed in the campaign. Moreover, by seeing her own values and lifestyle reflected in “Hero’s” message, one possible response may have been an enhanced sense of appreciation for the company, perhaps resulting in a purchase of the product. Thus, “Hero” could have functioned to both liberate and constrain the feminist views of this particular audience. It is probable that the readers in this audience rejected the images of traditional definitions of femininity, which could be considered liberating. However, it is also possible that the readers in this audience appreciated and identified with the appropriated feminist messages promoted by the ads, and ultimately accepted the rhetor’s strategy to appeal to such audiences as herself. These interpretations and actions do not necessarily signify

that the feminism of this particular audience was constrained by “Hero’s” message, but it is an important point to consider.

The “Mainstream” Reader

Relatively unaware of feminism and its relevant issues, the “mainstream” reader is another important audience to consider. Given the continued sexism in American society, which was reflected by the contradictory messages present in the “Hero” advertisements, it is quite possible that certain segments of Nike’s audience saw these ads and may not have recognized or engaged the feminist messages promoted by the ads. It is also a plausible assertion that this audience saw and mostly responded to the more traditional images and messages of femininity which were imbedded in the “Hero” campaign, such as that of a mother holding a baby (Appendix C), a young girl drying her hair (Appendix D), a Barbie doll (Appendix J), or a young girl playing dress-up in a ballerina costume (Appendix J). I argue that this audience may not have engaged the feminist message presented by the ads, and in this case, feminism is not really promoted or constrained. However, if feminist messages were noted by some readers in this audience, but not agreed upon or appreciated, the presence of feminism may have served to constrain these particular readers.

The “Athletic Woman” Reader

Another important audience for Nike’s “Hero” campaign was that of young women who had always had the opportunity to participate in athletics, dubbed “Title IX Babies.” Women in this audience may have had experiences similar to those described in the ads, but may not have been aware of either the significance or the commonality of these experiences. Seeing these issues being highlighted in the mass media may have

enabled this type of reader to realize that she was not alone, that her experiences were actually shared by other women in similar circumstances, and that there may be a common cause for these situations. By encouraging the reader to reflect on and engage her personal experiences with oppression within the realm of athletics, Nike invited the reader to think about larger issues she may have never before considered; consequently, for this audience, the ads in the “Hero” campaign had the potential to promote feminism by functioning as a device of consciousness raising.

Consciousness Raising From a Second- and Third Wave Perspective

In Chapter Two, I described the importance of the process of consciousness raising within the context of second wave radical feminism. As women engaged in consciousness raising groups, they would share the stories of their life circumstances with other women. In so doing, they were able to realize that their experiences with oppression were not isolated acts, disconnected from one another, but rather a part of a much broader cultural framework. Discussing their personal experiences with one another reassured women that they were not alone, and thus enabled them to uncover and process the patterns of oppression on a structural level. Subsequently, it was through the communication technique of consciousness raising that the theoretical and political foundations of radical feminism emerged (Freeman, 1995; Freeman, 1975).

One of the central ideological components of radical feminist theory was the concept that “the personal is political” (Ruth, 1989). Within the realm of second wave feminism, this statement represented the idea that a woman’s oppression is the result of patriarchal structures, rather than her personal inadequacies. In other words, one’s personal experiences of gendered oppression were the result of political causes. Thus,

“the personal is political,” as defined by second wave feminists, implied that the goal of feminism was for women to work together to transform, and ultimately eradicate, a system of patriarchy (Ruth, 1989). Within this context, the goal of consciousness raising was to create a space that united women, in which women could begin to understand the commonalities of their individual experiences, and find ways to creatively work together to effect change.

In the world of post-second wave feminism, however, consciousness raising has taken on a slightly different interpretation. Because young women have grown up in a world that has already reaped significant benefits from second wave activism, consciousness raising in the third wave has become less about the development of an awareness that sexism exists, and more about the process of coming to know what feminism means to each woman individually, and learning how to define her brand of feminism in terms that are consistent with her own identity. From this perspective, the focus of consciousness raising is personal transformation, through which one’s personal life becomes a critical site for social resistance (Hogeland, 2001). Additionally, Orr (1997) explains that consciousness raising for a young feminist is about “figuring out her own feminism”—that is, while she is living in a culture in which feminist sensibilities are present, she must learn how to own those sensibilities for herself (p. 42). By engaging in this process, a young woman discovers the ways in which the bigger picture of feminism impacts, and is impacted by, her personal choices.

Consequently, “the personal is political” has taken on a different interpretation within the context of third wave feminism (Shugart, 2001; Orr, 1997). Young feminists have deciphered this phrase to mean that if they define themselves as feminist, and

feminism is a political stance, then all of their personal choices and actions convey a particular political relevance or significance. One of the most salient characteristics of third wave feminism is its individualistic nature; within this context, personal choices are the preferred method for navigating the struggle with the complexities and contradictions that are an inherent part of living out feminist principles in everyday life (Shugart, 2001; Orr, 1997). Essentially, third wave feminists tend to promote personal empowerment as a means of working toward social change, and look for ways to incorporate individual differences in culture, experience, and perspective into their feminist ideology (Hogeland, 2001; Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein, 2001; Orr, 1997). Ultimately, this process assumes that a “ripple effect” will occur; that is, social change begins on an individual level with personal choice, and as individuals impact other individuals, these small changes will eventually lead to larger-scale change.

Critics argue that the third wave focus on individualism and personal choice as the preferred means for promoting social change is ineffective, in part because it obscures the structural inequalities that are an inherent part of a system of oppression (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Singley, 2002; Hogeland, 2001; Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein, 2001; Orr, 1997). They assert that a focus on personal choice places an enormous amount of emphasis on each individual act, thus establishing a system in which activists become complacent because hypocrisy is considered worse than inaction. Hogeland explains:

If we must purge ourselves of sexism before we can combat it in the social or political arenas, then action can always be postponed until we ourselves are somehow liberated—as if individual liberation were

possible inside oppressive social structures (2001, p. 114).

I argue that Nike's "Hero" campaign promotes feminism by inviting the athletic women in the audience to engage with the text, thereby functioning to heighten awareness of both individual and shared experiences with oppression within the arena of sports. Moreover, I assert that bodily experience and personal choice play an important role in the process of social change. However, I do not suggest that all audiences of the "Hero" campaign will respond to the feminist messages promoted by the ads, nor do I insinuate that personal awareness alone is enough to transform the current social structure. I acknowledge that personal choice and awareness without collective action are ineffective, and I agree that both are necessary in order to create measurable social change.

Consciousness Raising and the "Athletic Woman"

By asking direct questions about the reader's own experiences with oppression as a woman and an athlete, and encouraging her to draw on those experiences in order to supply her own answers, "Hero's" message prompts the more athletic women in the audience to engage in the process of developing personal awareness. Additionally, the discussion of such concerns and issues through advertising, a powerful tool of mass media, inherently suggests that the experiences with oppression described in the ads are not individual, but are rather situations that are perhaps shared by many females and female athletes in the target audiences.

Hogeland (2001) cautions that media coverage of feminist issues does not constitute consciousness raising; while she acknowledges that media may promote a certain basic awareness of feminist issues, she asserts that it does so by rarely addressing the politics of such awareness or examining the institutional structures that enact

oppression. I acknowledge that in some cases, and for certain audiences, this argument may be true. Because of their distinct subject positions, not all audiences are poised to fully engage with media coverage of feminist issues, and to ask larger questions about the causes of oppression.

I have argued in this paper that one form of media, advertising, *does* have the capability to interact with certain readers in very powerful and personal ways. Moreover, I assert that advertising has the potential to play an important role in the process of enabling some audiences to develop greater understanding about the relationship between their personal experiences and the greater social contexts in which those experiences occur. Consequently, I argue that advertising has the potential to serve as a device of consciousness raising for some audiences.

In her analysis of the *Our Bodies, Ourselves* texts (1971-1992), Sara Hayden (1997) argued that for some readers, the act of engaging with the texts could be the equivalent of a consciousness raising session. Hayden went on to argue that, similar to more traditional forms of consciousness raising, the heightened awareness of personal and structural oppressions that is gained through engagement with the text is not contained within a fixed or static moment, but rather it is an ongoing process that continuously evolves as the reader continues to reflect on the issues and shares her experiences through conversations with other women.

Building on Hayden's essay, I argue that the act of supplying personal experiences in response to the generalized and open-ended questions posed by the "Hero" advertisements enables some readers to engage in the equivalent of a consciousness raising session. Questions such as, "If we encourage muscles these days, what makes too

many muscles manly?” (appendix E), “Is it possible we’re now more admired for what we can do, rather than how we look?” (appendix H), and “When do we start so desperately wanting to be someone else? When do those first doubts about ourselves creep in?” (appendix J) invite the reader to participate in the ad by reflecting on her own experiences, and to begin to ask her own questions about why these situations are occurring. The portrayal of depersonalized, media-constructed women in the ads, rather than images of “real women,” could be seen as another strategy used by Nike to draw the reader into the message, making it easy for her to step into the situations described and apply the information and questions to herself. While the process of consciousness raising begins by reading the ads and considering personal knowledge and familiarity with these issues, it continues as the reader then engages in conversation with other women about similar experiences, and learns that her experiences are not uncommon.

To illustrate the manner in which the process of consciousness raising might occur through reading these ads, I will describe my own experience. I am a “Title-IX Baby” and I have been an avid runner for the past nineteen years. As a varsity athlete on both the cross country and swim teams in college, I spent a great deal of time in the gym and the weight room. I began lifting weights during my first year of college, and realized early on that the entire experience caused me to feel very uncomfortable: I felt intimidated by the fact that I was a woman surrounded by men in a traditionally male-dominated activity; I felt ridiculous that I had been advised by more than one coach to “lift light weights with high repetitions to gain tone and avoid bulk,” knowing that I was capable of lifting much heavier weights; and I felt self-conscious as I carried out my workout, knowing that I was being closely examined by my fellow weightlifters and not

intending or wanting to draw this kind of attention to myself or my body. Consequently, I began to frequent the gym during the “off” times, early morning and late at night, knowing that I would be one of the only people in the weight room. Although I had consciously rearranged my schedule to avoid placing myself in this situation, I don’t remember ever questioning the underlying reasons for why these issues occurred.

During my first year of graduate school, I was flipping through a magazine and came upon a Nike advertisement that described several issues that I’d encountered in my own experience of lifting weights. The ad caught my attention, and as I examined it more closely, I thought to myself, “Oh my gosh! They are talking about me!” I then gathered up all of the magazines in our apartment, eagerly searching for similar ads that I thought could be part of the same campaign. As I read the ads, I found myself reflecting on my own experiences as a college athlete, and feeling validated by the fact that I was seeing those experiences described in print in a mass-marketed advertising campaign. I began to realize that I was not alone in this situation, and that other female athletes had experienced situations and feelings similar to mine. I began to question the underlying reasons for why these issues existed. I began to talk about these experiences with other women. I began to draw connections between these experiences I’d had in the weight room and the greater social context in which they’d occurred. In essence, the act of engaging with the ads began an ongoing process of consciousness raising for me that ultimately enabled me to move from the personal to the political.

I have described the ways in which “Hero’s” message focused on feminist themes and asked questions that encouraged certain audiences, such as “Title-IX Babies,” to engage with the text. By inviting readers to reflect on their personal experiences with

oppression as athletes, and by enabling these women to realize that the experiences described were shared by other readers in the audience, “Hero’s” message had the potential to increase certain readers’ awareness of both personal and shared issues of oppression. By considering these insights gained within the context of athletics as a starting point, some women in Nike’s audience may have been better equipped to engage in the process of critically examining the framework of oppression in broader social realms, as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

As a form of rhetoric, advertising not only reflects our culture but also helps to create it. Building on this premise, I assert that advertising’s emphasis on women’s issues and interests of female athletes within the past fifteen years reveals that feminism and women’s sports are becoming more integrated into American society, and are becoming more common and accepted. Nike’s “Hero” advertising campaign for women is one example of an advertising campaign that has targeted women in sports. This campaign attempts to create identification with multiple audiences by incorporating feminist issues as well as traditional notions of femininity into its discourse.

I argue in Chapter Three that advertising has a variety of incentives for containing feminism; however, as feminism takes hold, advertisers have begun to appropriate feminist themes into its rhetoric in an effort to expand their business to a more “feminist consumer.” By strategically incorporating ambiguous messages of both feminism and mainstream femininity into the “Hero” advertising campaign, Nike promoted varied interpretations of the ads among multiple target audiences. While some feminist

audiences may have responded positively to the feminist messages in the ads, other feminist readers may have rejected the ads completely because of their appropriation of feminist themes; while mainstream readers may have engaged the more traditionally feminine messages in the ads and ignored feminist themes, athletic readers who saw their experiences with oppression in sports highlighted in the ads may have identified with the feminist message and engaged in the process of consciousness raising. Consequently, these ads functioned in different ways for different readers, and depending on the specific subject position of the different audience members, “Hero’s” message served to both promote and constrain feminism. Ultimately, Chapter Three illustrates that the examination of both the promotion and constraint of feminism in the “Hero” campaign is useful, as it serves to illustrate the complex interrelationships between feminism, women in sports, advertising, and rhetoric in our culture. Despite the constraints and limitations present in this message, I argue that Nike’s “Hero” advertising campaign for women ultimately reflects the potential and promise for advertising as a form of rhetoric to effect social change in a positive manner.

“Hero” Reflects the Potential of Advertising to Create Social Change

Heywood and Dworkin (2003) assert that media images can simultaneously do affirmative and negative, progressive and regressive work, and that these contradictions reflect the complexity of the time in which the text originates. In my analysis, I illustrated the ways in which Nike promoted both feminist and traditionally feminine messages through the “Hero” ads; I also highlighted and discussed several audiences for these ads, and discussed possible ways in which the ads may have functioned for each of these different audiences, given their specific subject positions. Focusing on one

particular audience, the “athletic woman” reader, I argued that “Hero’s” message served as a device of consciousness raising, and I explored the ways in which this process may have occurred for this particular audience of women.

I argue that the promotion of body feminism through the Nike “Hero” advertising campaign was significant, as it was relatively uncommon for advertisements in the 1990’s to encourage women’s development of feminist awareness. One of the dominant messages of this campaign encouraged the reader to use her body as a site of resistance, and to physically resist cultural norms of beauty and femininity. Specifically, some messages contained within the “Hero” campaign promoted body feminism by urging the reader to move her body freely, to train to develop a strong and muscular body, to learn through her discussions with other women about experiences of oppression within the realm of athletics, and potentially to apply the knowledge and awareness gained through her bodily experiences to other areas of her life and her world. While I recognize that the development of feminist awareness within the context of advertising and women’s sports is necessarily limited by this context, I argue that the potential exists for these insights to inform and shape other areas of women’s lives in valuable ways. Therefore, despite the ways in which the “Hero” campaign placed constraints on feminism, I argue that this message also carried with it the potential and promise for advertising to effect positive social change.

Implications For Third Wave Feminism

Because advertising is one of the major channels through which we learn cultural values, attitudes, and ideals, it carries with it an enormous amount of power to shape cultural attitudes. Because of this power to educate and socialize, advertising has long

been criticized by feminist scholars for the negative cultural messages it sends to and about women (Kilbourne, 2000, 1987; Cortese, 1999; Twitchell, 1996).

In this paper I have argued that Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women provided an example of advertising that promoted feminist themes in order to offer a positive message for women. I have acknowledged and discussed in-depth the limitations of this argument, most notably the fact that media has a vested interest in containing feminism, and I have illustrated in Chapter 3 some of the very ways in which Nike accomplished this in the "Hero" campaign. However, I have also illustrated through my analysis that, despite these limitations and constraints, "Hero's" message did promote feminism, and that for some audiences of women, this could have very real and lasting implications. Ultimately, I assert that while it was not the most perfect or complete feminist stance, this campaign offered a positive and hopeful example for the future direction of advertising. More specifically, I argue that "Hero" reflects the potential for advertising to be used as a tool to promote social change.

Feminist theorists argue that an underlying impetus of third wave feminism is to find new and various methods to bring "academic feminism" to the larger audiences of the "real world" (Orr, 1997). As I discussed in Chapter One, third wave feminists place an emphasis on the value of disseminating their message through various forms of popular mass media, such as music, 'zines, and the Internet (Gilmore, 2001; Shugart, 2001; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Findlen, 1995). Third wave feminists argue that these alternative methods of communication enable feminist discourse to reach beyond the academy, thus enabling feminism's message to be more accessible for those who will never have the privilege of taking a class or reading a scholarly journal.

In conjunction with these arguments, I assert that certain types of advertising provide another important form of media for third wavers to use as an educational tool. As previously discussed, commercial advertising is necessarily limited by its goal to sell a product; however, social movement advertising, such as that used by advocates of gun control, the American Heart Association, or anti-drug campaigns, offers an alternative that is unambiguous in its motives. Because it is not linked to the bottom line of increasing sales or brand recognition, social movement advertising carries with it the potential to be very clear and direct in its efforts to educate and persuade. Because its ability to reach and influence multiple and varied audiences, social movement advertising provides a viable possibility for third wave feminists to use as a tool to effect change.

The Current State of Affairs

As I discussed in Chapter One, Nike's "Hero" advertising campaign for women was featured from 1999-2000; this time period marked an important turning point for women in sports in the United States. The effects of 1972 Title IX legislation were only beginning to unfold, as the first generation of girls for whom participation in athletics has always been an option were becoming young women. Female athletes enjoyed great success at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, and the US women won their second World Cup Soccer Championship in 1999. Athletic companies such as Reebok, Adidas, and Nike began to recognize the significance of this cultural shift, and capitalized on the enormous business potential of this previously-untapped (and, due to lack of opportunity, previously non-existent) market of young, athletic women. "Hero" was one of Nike's first advertising campaigns designed to target this rising generation of "Title IX" babies, and one of the first campaigns among athletic apparel companies to incorporate feminist

values into its message. The “Hero” advertising campaign emerged in the midst of an important historical time in women’s athletics in the United States; consequently, the examination of this campaign is valuable, as it provides important insights into the complex interweaving of the cultural, economic, social and political situation of women in the United States in the late 1990’s. Moreover, “Hero” provides insight into the current situation of women in sports.

These are exciting times for women’s athletics, as participation by women and girls in sports and fitness activities continues to rise. While 300,000 high school girls and 30,000 college-age women participated in organized sports in 1971, current statistics show that 2.8 million high school girls and 150,000 college women participated in 2004 (Philadelphia Inquirer, 2004). As more women and girls are involved in athletics, media coverage of women’s sports and fitness issues has also increased.

Nike has continued to focus much of its efforts on the women’s market, as have other athletic companies such as Adidas, Reebok, and Gatorade. Ads such as Gatorade’s television spot featuring Mia Hamm competing against Michael Jordan in a variety of activities, to the tune of “Anything you can do, I can do better...” playing in the background, as well as Secret Anti-Perspirant’s print ad depicting the US Women’s National Soccer Team raising their arms in victory, and bearing the caption, “We don’t wear cups—We win them” have become increasingly more common. Nike’s “I Am” ad campaign of 2001 and nikegoddess.com website, along with Reebok’s “It’s a Woman’s World” campaign of 2002 provide other recent examples of marketing efforts to target athletic female consumers. In addition, companies which focus their efforts entirely on women’s athletics, such as Title IX Sports and X-Chrōm, are becoming more common.

While the continued and persistent marketing attention to women in sports is certainly the result of business and profit objectives, this trend also reveals important messages about the importance of women's sports in our culture today.

While very few women athletes could be considered well-known or respected as recently as fifteen years ago, modern-day female athletes such as soccer players Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain, tennis players Venus and Serena Williams, basketball players Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoopes, and track stars Suzy Hamilton and Marion Jones have virtually become household names. Even more importantly, these women have become increasingly well-respected and valued as strong, competitive athletes, and are serving as role models for younger generations of women.

While all of these examples reflect positive trends for women's sports in the United States, issues of inequality remain. Professional athletic careers are not prevalent for women, and those who do obtain these positions are unable to obtain the multi-million dollar contracts that are available to their male counterparts. Coaching and administrative positions in the arena of athletics are still disproportionately filled by men. Women athletes still combat the double standard of being recognized more for their sexual attractiveness than for their athletic achievement; this is perpetuated by some athletes such as 2004 Olympians Amy Acuff, Amanda Beard, Haley Cope, and Logan Tom, who posed for magazines such as Playboy and FHM (Drape, 2004). Despite these issues, the positive trajectory of women's sports and the increasing media attention to these issues is encouraging.

Directions For Future Research

It would be useful to examine the ways in which feminist themes have been discussed through other, non-sports related advertising campaigns, and to compare and contrast these findings to that of the “Hero” campaign. It would also be interesting to examine the influence that the specific type of company or product being advertised has on the promotion and constraint of feminist values through its message.

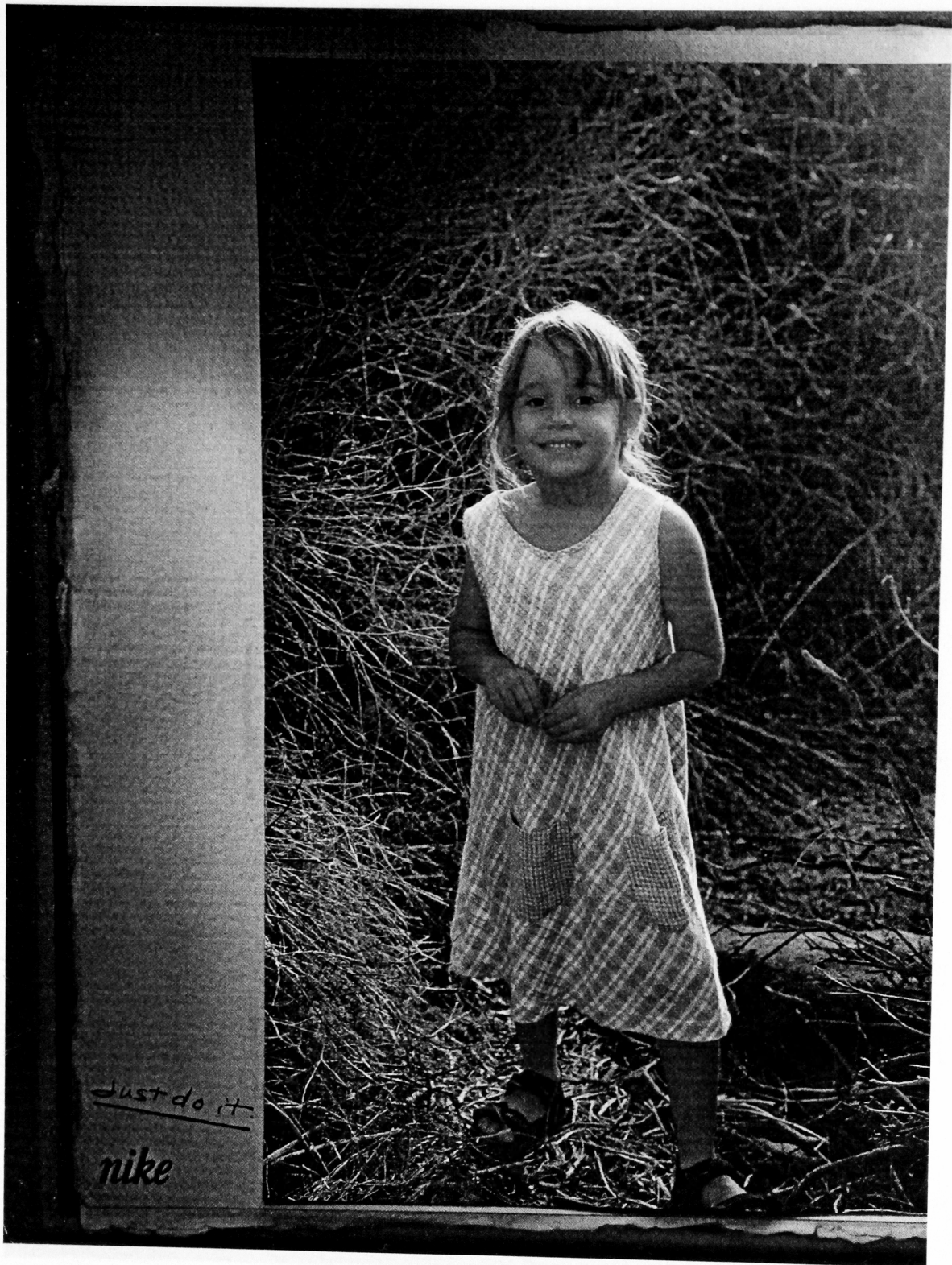
Another possibility for future research might be the consideration of ways in which to maintain the integrity of mediated images of feminism as they become more accessible through mainstream advertising. This becomes particularly important in the event that advertising does become a more popular method for working toward social change.

Because the “Hero” campaign was featured in magazines from 1999-2000, and because the situation of women’s sports in the United States is currently changing very rapidly, it would be interesting to examine a similar advertising campaign that is being featured today. Particularly due to the summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, conversations in the media about women in sports are currently at an all-time high. It could be worthwhile and insightful to examine the changes in attitudes toward women athletes and feminism by comparing current ads featuring women athletes to the “Hero” campaign.



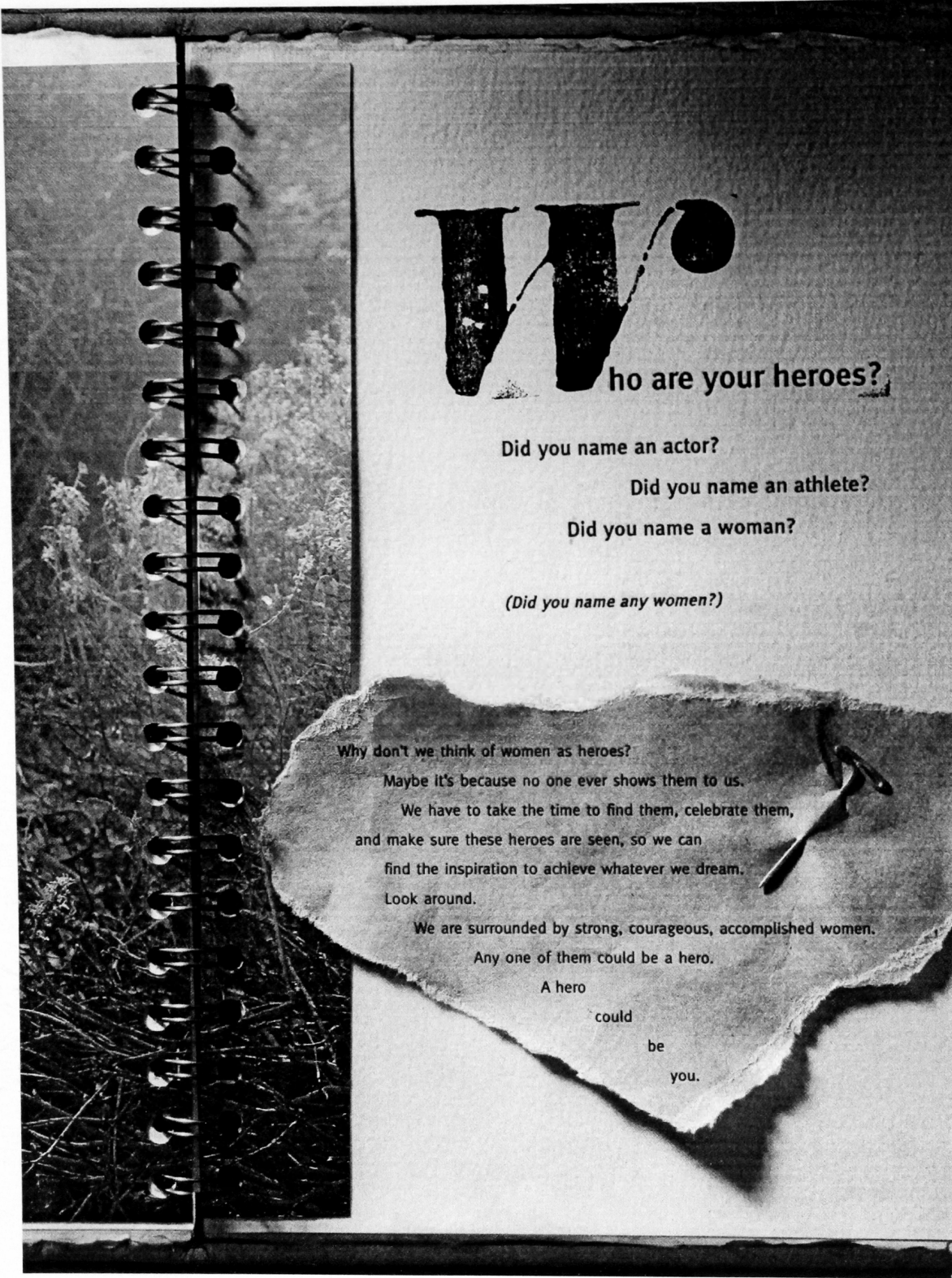
Will she

look at magazines and think she has to be as thin as the models she sees?
think that independence makes her less desirable?
lower her expectations because she can't find women to look up to?



Just do it.

nike



Who are your heroes?

Did you name an actor?

Did you name an athlete?

Did you name a woman?

(Did you name any women?)

Why don't we think of women as heroes?

Maybe it's because no one ever shows them to us.

We have to take the time to find them, celebrate them,
and make sure these heroes are seen, so we can
find the inspiration to achieve whatever we dream.
Look around.

We are surrounded by strong, courageous, accomplished women.

Any one of them could be a hero.

A hero

could

be

you.



Does a hero know she's a hero if no one tells her?

Do you know a hero no one else knows? A hero doesn't have to
save a busload of school kids from certain disaster.

Or score the winning point in the big game.

A hero can be anyone who inspires you, anyone you look up to,
anyone who cheers you on, makes you better than you were before—

just as they made themselves better
than they were before.

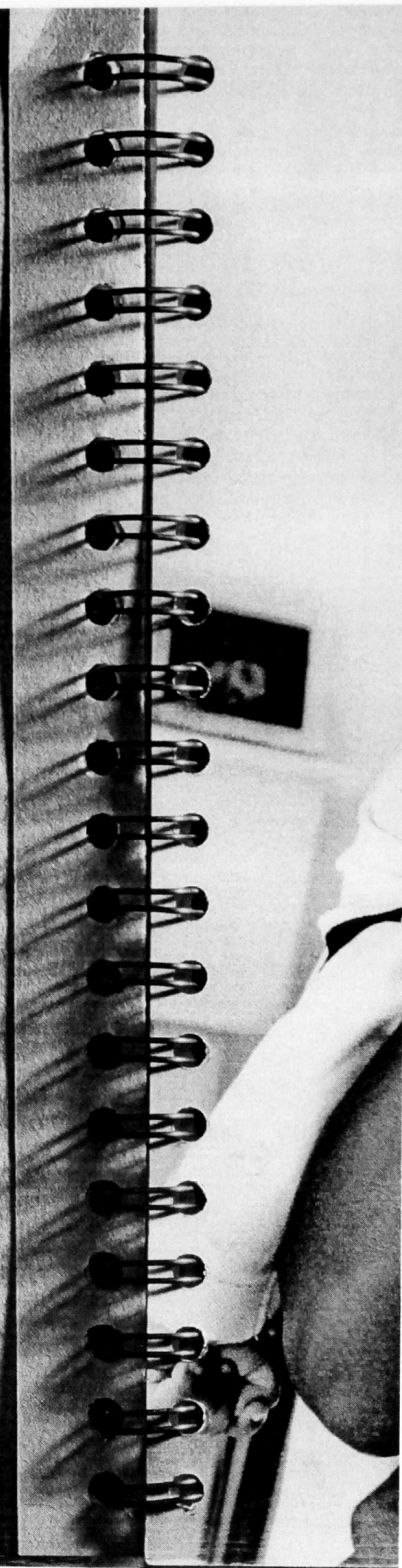
Do you know a hero?

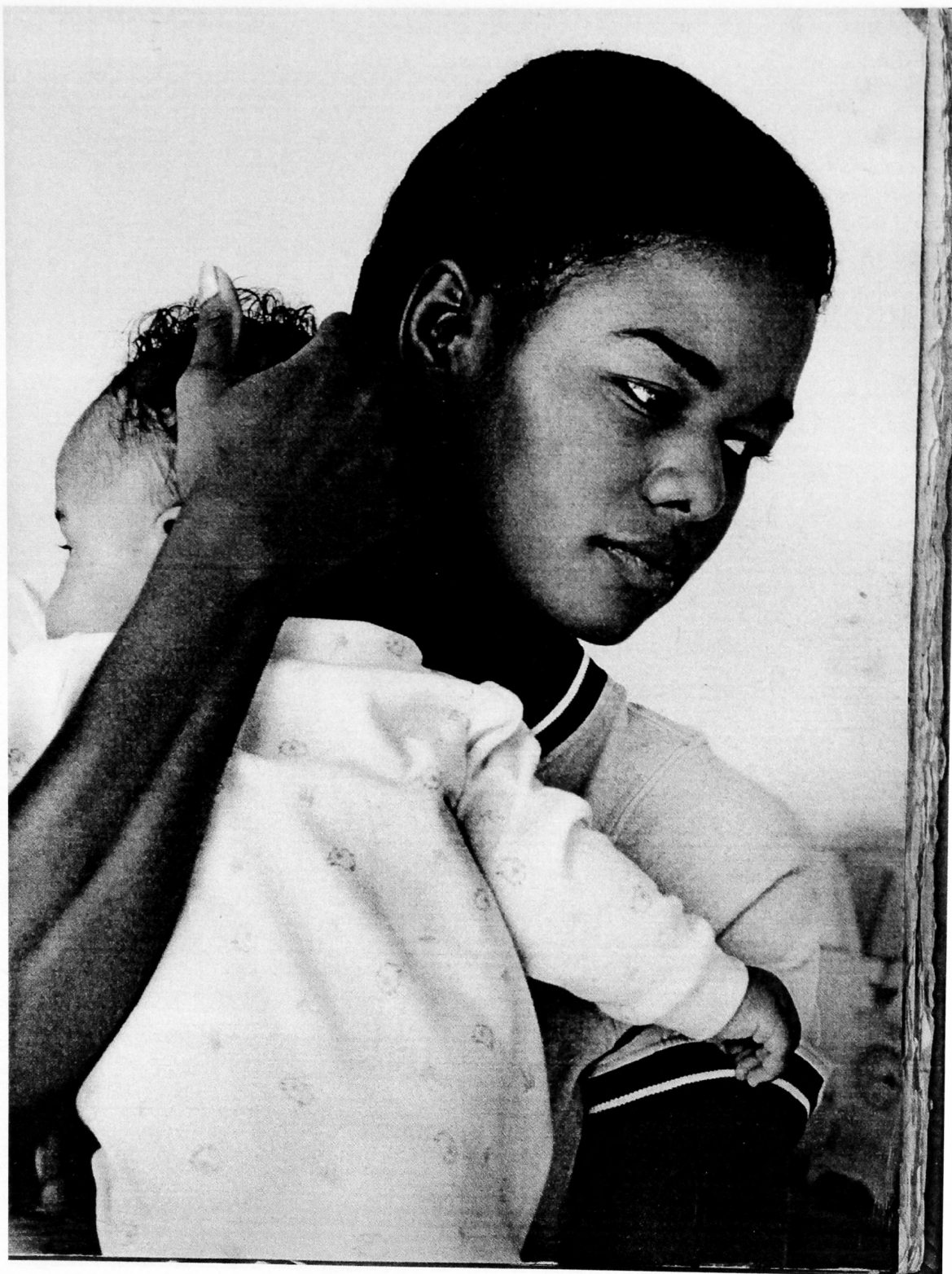
Tell her.

Then tell everyone.



Just do it.







magazine is not a mirror.

Have you ever seen anyone in a magazine who

seemed even vaguely like you looking back?

(If you have, turn the page.)

Most magazines are made to sell us a fantasy of what we're supposed to be.

They reflect what society deems to be a standard,

however unrealistic or unattainable that standard is.

That doesn't mean you should cancel your subscription.

It means you need to remember

that it's just ink on paper.

And that whatever standards you set for yourself,

for how much you want to weigh,

for how hard you work out,

or how many times you make it to the gym,

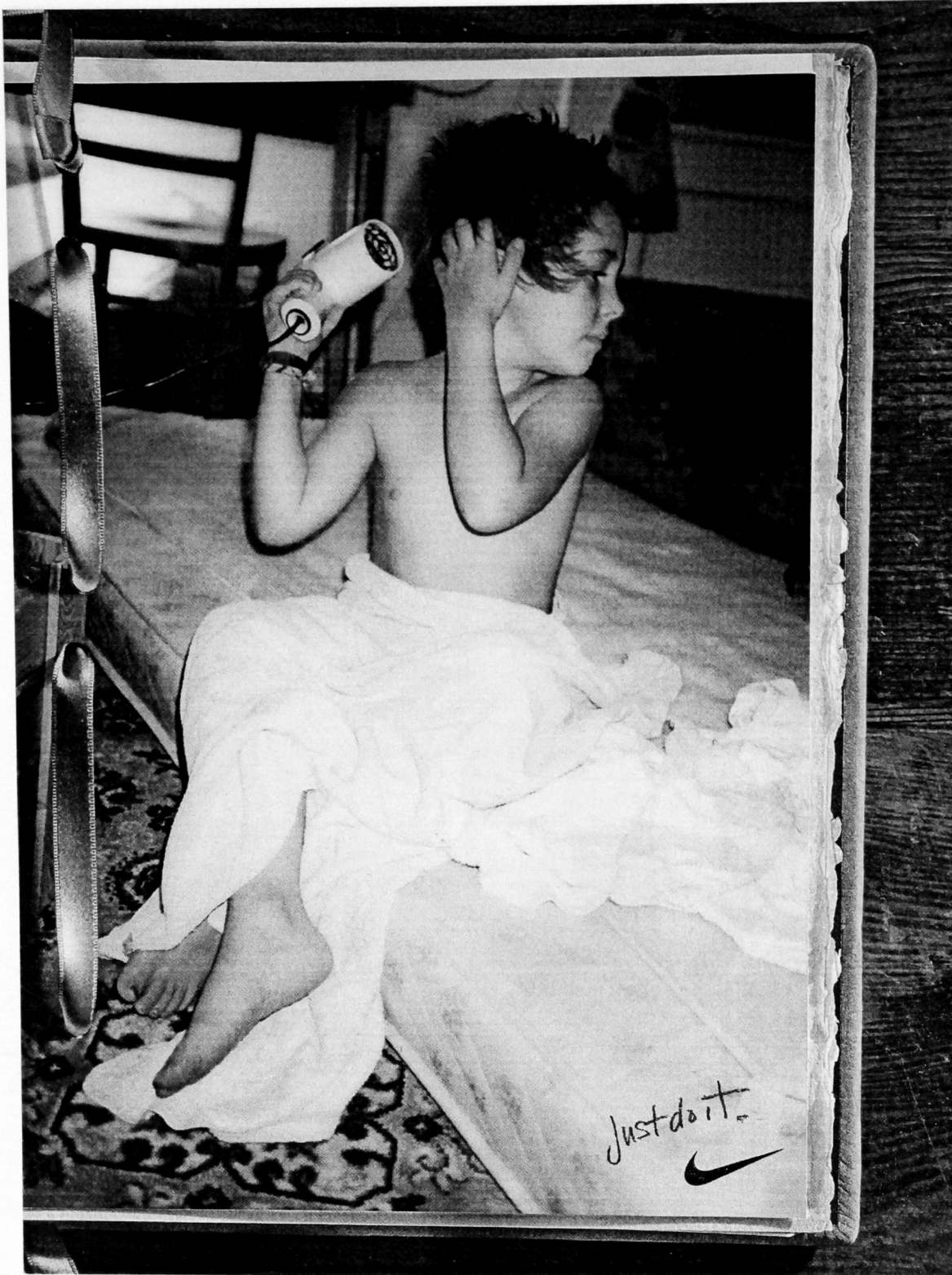
should be your standards.

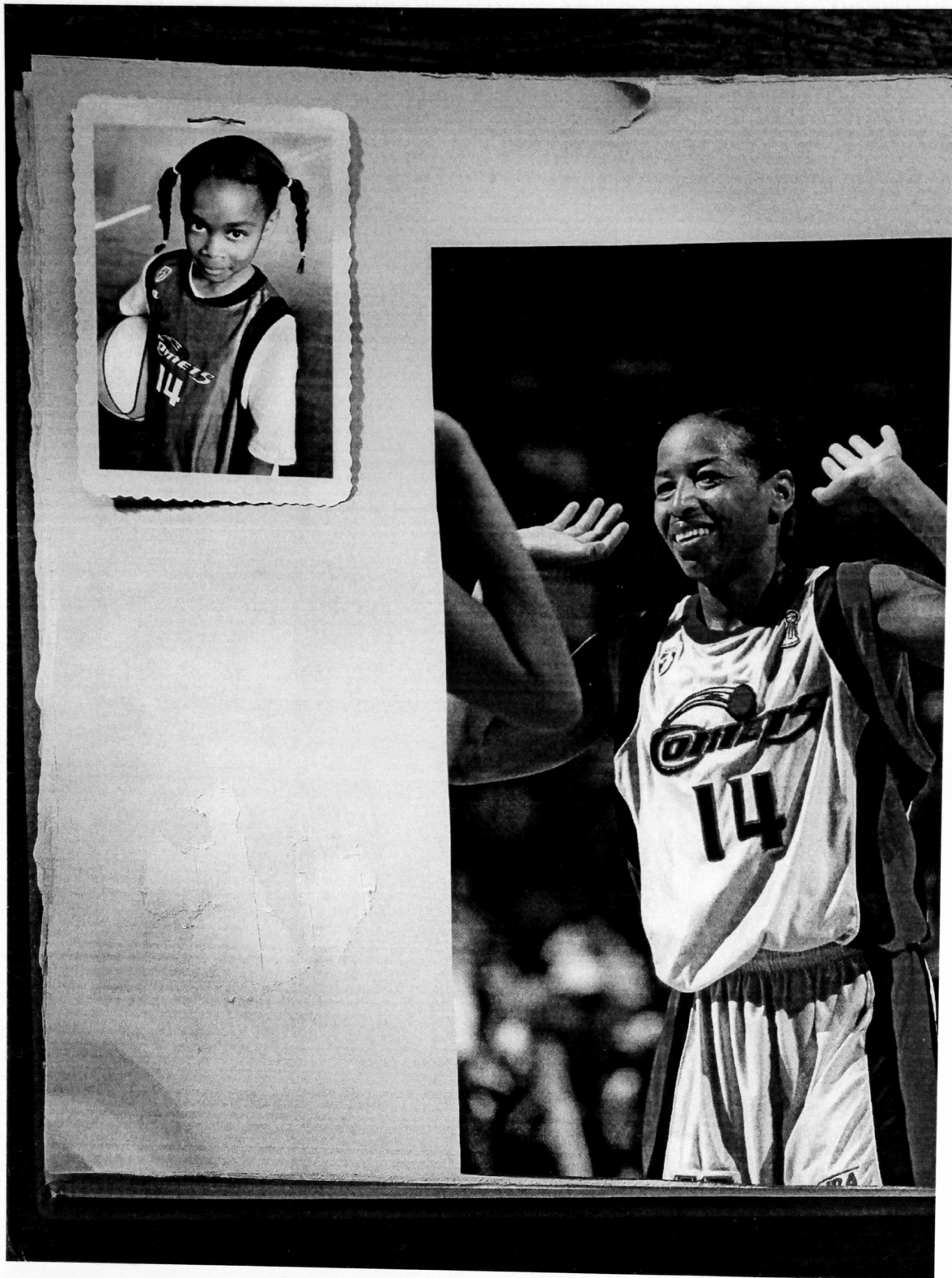
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nike

Two years ago, even she
didn't know she was a hero.

How do you know you're a hero? Is there an exact moment —

when a little girl walks up to you wearing a team jersey,

and you realize it's yours?

Is it the first time you hear the sound of a sold-out arena?

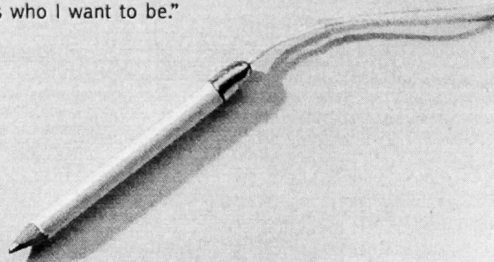
Or see your face on the front page of the sports section, instead of inside?

Two years ago if you asked someone who Cynthia Cooper was, you might get a blank stare.

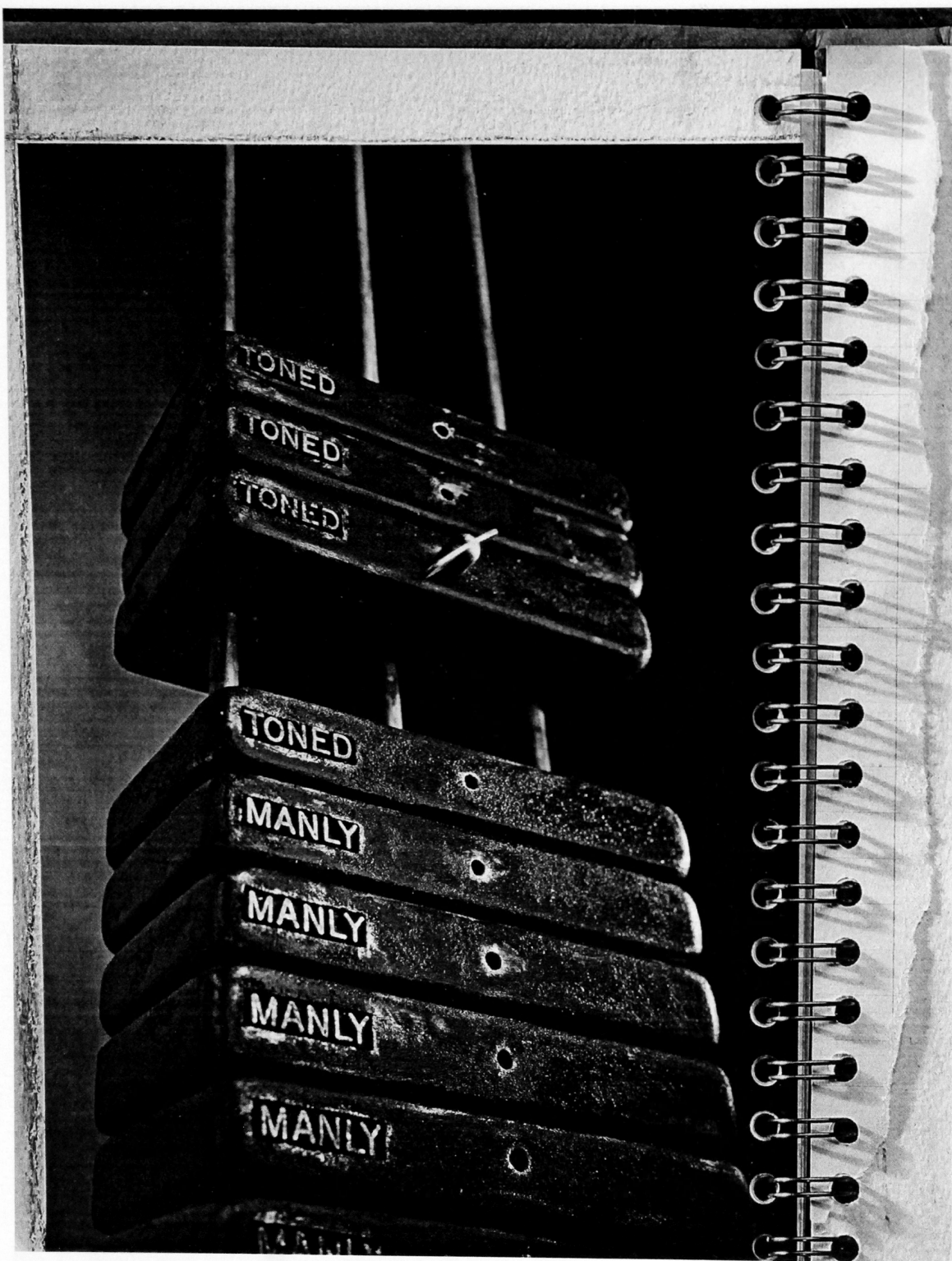
But after two WNBA championships, two MVP awards, two sparkling seasons

full of enchanted, excited fans, when you ask, you'll hear:

"Man, that's who I want to be."



Just do it



W hat makes women think this?

If we encourage muscles these days,

why are too many muscles manly?

We were all born with muscles.

They don't belong exclusively on men,

any more than skin belongs exclusively on women.

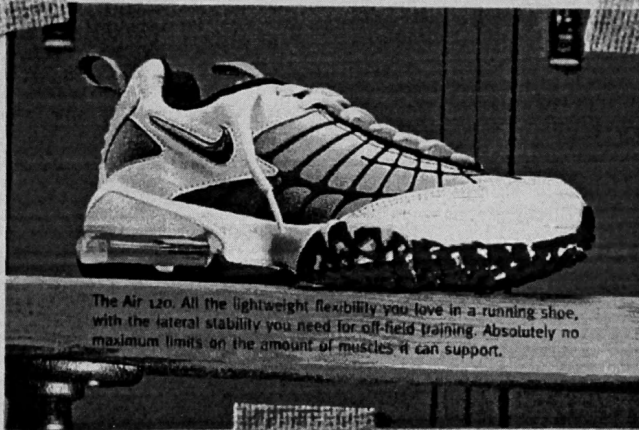
Isn't it possible for femininity and physical power to coexist?

Isn't it possible that the more we embrace our bodies,

the more womanly we become?

Embrace your body.

And find out.



The Air 120. All the lightweight flexibility you love in a running shoe, with the lateral stability you need for off-field training. Absolutely no maximum limits on the amount of muscles it can support.

just do it.







Mia Hamm,
US Women's National
Soccer Team,
1981 - present,
granddaughter

Carol Lychak Dillon,
Long Beach Recreational
Softball League,
1936 - 1938,
grandmother

You pass on more to your children
and your grandchildren than your eye color,



your hair color,

your crooked smile.

You also pass on

your enthusiasm,

your spirit,

your desire to compete.

You provide

the living example

that they can become

more than they ever

thought they could.

Because

you

did.

Just do it.

Harper's Bazaar June 1999

Shape, June 1999
Appendix H

Is it possible we're more beautiful in motion than we are standing still?

Is it possible we're now more admired for what we can do,
rather than how we look?

Yes.

Beauty is now something we express
through strength, passion, and skill.

And it's time we applauded ourselves for doing it.

And recognized the power in each walk.

Because the more we keep moving,

the more we leave in our wake a lasting image

of

what's

beautiful.



The Air Propensity walking shoe. Keep a smooth, rolling stride,
with forefoot flex grooves. Pull out the removable midsole, and
see how your foot rests right on top of cushy Max Air. When
worn properly, the Air Propensity should be hard to spot.



Vogue May 1999



When do we start so desperately wanting to be someone else?

When do those first doubts about ourselves creep in?

Why do we let them?

From childhood we see images of idealized women.

We convince ourselves that they are cuter, more fit,
somehow more womanly than we are.

Why do they make us want to change ourselves?

Think about how good you can feel, how wonderfully exhausted
(and totally exhilarated) you can be after a workout.

It's not just the physical results, it's the energy you create that makes you
feel self-assured, proud of yourself, more beautiful.

And that can make us happy to be

EXACTLY

WHO

WE

ARE.

Appendix J



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